



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



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	International	National	Regional and Local
Events, Opportunities Go to articles	04/04 Day 40 of the Russia invasion 04/04 World leaders vow new sanctions 04/04 China rallies domestic sympathy Russia 04/04 Russia forces 'butchers, rapists, looters' 04/04 Russia synonymous with Bucha massacre 04/04 Conscripts Donbas region sent to frontlines 04/03 Day 39 of the Russia invasion 04/03 Drug shortages persist in Russia 04/03 Life, death under Russia occupation 04/03 Putin next move revealed amid retreat 04/03 US, Europe outrage over civilians killed 04/03 Russian anti-war protesters fly new flag 04/03 Ukraine demands new Russia sanctions 04/03 In retreat Russia accused of war crimes 04/03 Rape as Russia weapon of war in Ukraine 04/03 Ukraine assesses damage Russia pullback 04/03 Elite Ukraine unit ambushed Russia forces 04/03 Secret intel unusual public role Ukraine war 04/03 Ukraine president faces new set challenges 04/03 China Covid crisis grows: surge in cases 04/03 BA.2 variant is most unpredictable one yet 04/03 Shanghai Covid rules separate kids, parents 04/03 Pakistan PM dissolves parliament 04/03 Sri Lanka cabinet resigns en masse 04/03 Protests over shortages roil Sri Lanka 04/03 NKorea warns Seoul of 'serious threat' 04/03 China backs off economic policy initiative 04/03 Pro-Putin leaders Hungary, Serbia elections 04/02 Day 38 of the Russia invasion 04/02 Russia oil faces market strains 04/02 Lithuania halts Russia gas imports 04/02 Russia halts space station cooperation 04/02 Analysis of why Russia army has stalled 04/02 Russia threat draws new NATO front line 04/02 Russia Ukraine war threatens China trade 04/02 Ukraine: Russia forces retreat Kyiv region 04/02 Israel forces kill 3 militants in shootout 04/02 US, Philippines engage large military drill 04/02 Yemen warring parties agree to cease-fire 04/02 Health experts: polio eradication threatened 04/02 Cuts in Britain cause Covid data drought? 04/01 Russia strategy shifts: lengthy war looms 04/01 Ukraine president strikes an ominous tone 04/01 US to help transfer Soviet tanks to Ukraine 04/01 Iran nuclear talks at stalemate 04/01 China Covid outbreak ravages hospital	04/03 Some states face rise in Covid cases 04/03 Nursing home deaths at pandemic lows 04/03 Covid, diabetes in public health collision 04/03 Masks off, mandates, work protocols loosen 04/03 Border braces for record chaos 04/03 Zelenskyy from Ukraine at Grammys 04/03 Mayhem: spring break West coast style 04/03 Another pain: car insurance rates rising 04/03 Russia war push auto prices, shortages? 04/03 Airlines cancel 3,300+ flights over weekend 04/03 US relations Saudi Arabia, UAE hit new low 04/02 Renewed interest in labor movement 04/02 Seeking recession clues in yield curve 04/02 Protests outside officials' homes continue 04/02 State courts strike down redistricting maps 04/02 Bird flu hits poultry flocks, egg prices jump 04/02 Pentagon: \$300M Ukraine weapons package 04/01 Number Covid hospital patients record low 04/01 March jobs report fuels larger Fed rate rise? 04/01 Intel failure: misjudged Russia capabilities 04/01 Deadly climate pairing of fire, then floods 04/01 NHTSA: new vehicles 40mpg avg by 2026	04/04 Oregon decriminalization of drugs mixed 04/03 S'Klallam Tribe returns to ancestral lands 04/03 Thousands stranded Alaska cancels flights 04/03 WA nuclear war planning halted 1984: now? 04/02 Ukraine refugees arrive early than expected 04/01 WA law: phase out gas cars by 2030 04/01 Seattle rent prices exponential growth 04/01 Judge: no SEALs training in state parks 04/01 Alaska Air cancels flights as pilots picket 04/01 Court: racial covenants stay public record 04/01 Steps to take now to prepare for the quake 04/01 Absolutely positive: quake to ravage Seattle
Cyber Awareness Go to articles	04/04 BlackGuard infostealer malware 04/04 Mirai botnet variant: Beastmode 04/04 London: 2 teens charged; Lapsus group 04/03 New Borat remote access malware 04/03 Fake Trezor breach email steals wallets 04/03 Russian Orthodox church emails hacked 04/01 Anonymous targets Russia oligarchs 04/01 Ukraine: Russia WhatsApp bot farm texts 04/01 West races to counter Putin's propaganda	04/02 American Express down in outage 04/01 Experts warn: don't relax on Log4j 04/01 Fallout of Salt Lake City IT security breach 04/01 Phishing campaign targets election officials 04/01 FBI: ransomware targets local governments	
Terror Conditions Go to articles	04/03 Taliban trying to save Afghan highways 04/03 Blast in Afghan capital: 1 killed, 59 injured 04/03 Taliban outlaw opium farming Afghanistan 04/02 Israel forces eliminate 'imminent attack' 04/02 UN concern: Mali violence on civilians	04/03 US repatriates Algerian after 20yrs Gitmo 04/02 Trial change future of US terrorism cases? 04/02 Pentagon investigates extremism in military	

Suspicious, Unusual Go to articles	04/03 In the ocean, it is snowing microplastics 04/03 Dire warning climate change go unheeded	04/04 Airfares up 40% from Jan; more increases?	04/01 Record 72 killer whales Salish Sea in a day 04/01 Invasive rose- and hop-eating beetle
Crime, Criminals Go to articles	04/04 Germany arrests extremist; 1991 attack 04/03 Mexico Riviera Maya drug-related violence	04/03 Fentanyl deaths in US keep rising 04/03 Sacramento shooting: 6 dead, 9 injured 04/03 Dallas concert shooting: 1 dead, 11 injured 04/03 Rural South Carolina: 5 injured in shooting 04/03 Hundreds of NYC prosecutors leaving jobs 04/02 Virginia mall shooting: 1 killed, 2 wounded 04/02 Sentence: 650yrs; brutal 1980s sex crimes 04/02 FOP: 101 officers shot in line of duty 2022 04/02 Ghislaine Maxwell conviction upheld	04/03 Uptick in western WA highway shootings 04/02 FBI: arrest; threats to Texas senator 04/02 Rolling gun battle on I-5: crash, arrests 04/02 WA state's worst prison Covid outbreak 04/02 Seattle police probe 2 homicides in a day 04/02 Seattle grim mark: 13 homicides into 2022 04/02 Probe: deputy shot off-duty cop after 4sec. 04/01 SPD shoplifting crackdown: 49 arrests 04/01 Deadly violence against law enforcement

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Events, Opportunities

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	04/04 China rallies domestic sympathy Russia
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/04/world/asia/china-russia-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>While Russian troops have battered Ukraine, officials in China have been meeting behind closed doors to study a Communist Party-produced documentary that extols President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia as a hero.</p> <p>The humiliating collapse of the Soviet Union, the video says, was the result of efforts by the United States to destroy its legitimacy. With swelling music and sunny scenes of present-day Moscow, the documentary praises Mr. Putin for restoring Stalin's standing as a great wartime leader and for renewing patriotic pride in Russia's past.</p> <p>To the world, China casts itself as a principled onlooker of the war in Ukraine, not picking sides, simply seeking peace. At home, though, the Chinese Communist Party is pushing a campaign that paints Russia as a long-suffering victim rather than an aggressor and defends China's strong ties with Moscow as vital.</p> <p>Chinese universities have organized classes to give students a "correct understanding" of the war, often highlighting Russia's grievances with the West. Party newspapers have run series of commentaries blaming the United States for the conflict.</p> <p>Around the country, the Communist Party has organized sessions for officials to watch and discuss the history documentary. The 101 minute-long video, which was completed last year, does not mention the war in Ukraine but argues that Russia is right to worry about neighbors that broke away from the Soviet Union. It describes Mr. Putin as cleansing Russia of the political toxins that killed the Soviet Union.</p> <p>"The most powerful weapon possessed by the West is, aside from nuclear weapons, the methods they use in ideological struggle," says the documentary's stern-voiced narrator, citing a Russian scholar. The documentary was marked for internal viewing — that is, for audiences chosen by party officials and not for general public release — but the video and script have recently surfaced online in China.</p> <p>Since the demise of the Soviet Union, it says, "some countries in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Transcaucasia have become forward positions for the West to contain and meddle in Russia."</p> <p>China's leaders have long used the Soviet collapse as a cautionary tale, but Mr. Xi has given that tale a more urgent, ominous spin. In doing so, he has embraced Mr. Putin as a fellow authoritarian lined up against Western dominance, demonstrating to the Chinese people that Mr. Xi has a partner in his cause.</p> <p>China has refused to condemn Mr. Putin for the war, which has killed thousands of civilians. Despite pressure from other world leaders to use its influence over Moscow to help end the crisis, Beijing has done little besides call for peace. And on Thursday Wang Yi, the Chinese foreign minister, expressed his</p>

country's commitment to strong ties with Moscow during talks with his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, in China.

The Biden administration has cast the war as a contest between democracy and authoritarianism. Chinese officials are mounting a counternarrative that American-led domineering is the source of conflict in Ukraine and elsewhere. They regard China and Russia as both menaced by "color revolution," the party's phrase for insurrections backed by Western governments. President Biden's recent comments calling for Mr. Putin's ousting are likely to reinforce Beijing's view.

"They actually believe their own narrative about color revolutions and tend to see this whole situation as a U.S.-led color revolution to overthrow Putin," said Christopher K. Johnson, the president of the China Strategies Group and a former Central Intelligence Agency analyst of Chinese politics.

"Both domestically and internationally, Xi has been pedaling this dark narrative since he took power," Mr. Johnson said in an interview. "It allows him to justify his accumulation of power and the changes he's made by creating this sense of struggle and danger."

The documentary depicts the collapse of the Soviet Union as a lesson to Chinese officials not to be seduced by Western liberalism. China, the documentary says, must never follow the course taken by Mikhail S. Gorbachev, the Soviet Union's last leader who had started glasnost, or openness, and engagement with the West.

In 2013, propaganda officials under Mr. Xi put out a documentary on the lessons of the collapse of the Soviet Union. This latest take offers an even more conspiratorial interpretation.

The documentary attributes the decline of the Soviet Union to political liberalization, especially what Beijing calls "historical nihilism," or emphasizing the Communist Party's mistakes and misdeeds. It accuses historians critical of the Soviet revolution of fabricating estimated death tolls by many millions for Stalin's purges.

Stalin, it argues, was a modernizing leader whose purges went too far but initially "were something of a necessity" given the threats to Soviet rule. It suggests that rock music and modern fashion were symptoms of the moral rot that later set in.

"They've taken only one lesson from all of this, and that is you do not allow any freedom of expression," said Sergey Radchenko, a professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies who studies Chinese and Soviet history, "because this kind of freedom inevitably leads to loss of political control and that creates chaos."

The documentary credits Mr. Putin with restoring Russia's spirit.

It shows Mr. Putin marching in a parade marking Russia's victory over Nazi Germany, and young Russians kissing a banner featuring his portrait. Previous leaders in Moscow — above all Mr. Gorbachev and Nikita S. Khrushchev — are portrayed as dupes, bewitched by the siren song of liberal reform and Western superiority.

The documentary, "Historical Nihilism and the Soviet Collapse," has been the centerpiece of a monthslong campaign aimed at party officials that has continued since Russia began its full assault on Ukraine on Feb. 24, according to reports on local government websites. Officials overseeing the screenings are often described in official notices as calling for cadres to maintain firm loyalty to Mr. Xi.

"Loving a party and its leader is not a cult of personality," Zheng Keyang, a former deputy director of the party's Central Policy Research Office and a consultant on the documentary, said in a discussion about the documentary published by a pro-party website this month.

Chinese leaders have been debating why the Soviet Union fell apart ever since it dissolved in 1991. More than his predecessors, Mr. Xi has blamed the Soviet Union's breakup on lack of ideological spine and Western political subversion.

"If you have the worldview that you see in this documentary, you could tell yourself the story that the Russians are facing a real threat from the West," Joseph Torigian, an assistant professor at American University in Washington who studies elite politics in China and Russia, said in an interview.

The study drive is aimed at instilling loyalty among cadres before a Chinese Communist Party congress late this year where Mr. Xi appears set to claim a third term.

Political loyalty has become more crucial to Mr. Xi as Beijing tries to contain Covid outbreaks with stringent lockdowns, and manage a slowing economy. China's foreign policy is under scrutiny, after some Chinese scholars posted essays criticizing Beijing's refusal to condemn Mr. Putin.

Many of the critical essays have been deleted and the party has pushed harder to defend its stance in recent weeks. Editorials in Communist Party newspapers have amplified the Chinese leadership's argument that the real culprit in Ukraine is the United States and NATO, for undermining Russian security.

"It was the United States that personally lit the fuse of the present conflagration between Russia and Ukraine," stated one of a series of editorials in the Liberation Army Daily, the military's main newspaper.

Universities and colleges have organized indoctrination lectures for students, suggesting that officials are worried that young, educated Chinese may be receptive to the criticisms that Beijing has been too indulgent of Mr. Putin.

Liu Zuokui, a researcher from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, told an audience of college students in eastern China that the war arose from "NATO's eastward expansion that squeezed Russia's space for survival," an online summary of the lecture said.

China, another speaker told physicists in Beijing, had to protect its strategic partnership with Russia from "intense shocks and impacts."

The party's demands for conformity over the crisis will make it harder for any dissent to coalesce into a pushback against Mr. Xi.

"There's an 'either we hang together or we hang separately' attitude that comes into play," Mr. Johnson, the former C.I.A. analyst, said of Chinese leaders. "If it's a strong nationalist approach, then who in the party doesn't want to be a good nationalist?"

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/03 WA nuclear war planning halted 1984; now?
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/times-watchdog/washington-stopped-planning-for-nuclear-war-in-1984-should-we-start/
GIST	<p>Jesse Galle spit sideways onto the cherry blossom-strewn earth as he approached a seemingly inconsequential stretch of the underpass below Interstate 5 in Seattle's Roosevelt neighborhood.</p> <p>The bridge specialist checks this spot weekly, today walking around a half-unfolded sleeping couch, saturated with rain, and a metal table, recently abandoned. Traffic rushed by overhead, and neither passing joggers nor children dressed in rain boots considered a second look.</p> <p>Most people don't notice the door to a long-abandoned fallout shelter.</p>

“We might be opening it up pretty soon if things keep going the way they are,” said Galle, who works for the Washington State Department of Transportation, looking closely at the metal seal welding shut the gray industrial door frame.

Six decades ago, this place was envisioned for a moment not unlike the present: when the United States could find itself mitigating the potential for another nuclear power to use its arsenal.

Inside, a large, circular room, painted pale army green and stretching four lanes beneath the freeway, is outfitted with radiation filters, a decontamination shower, a generator and toilets. It can hold 200 people, each allotted about the space of a yoga mat, end-to-end.

But the shelter now is not functional and there are no plans to change that, even after nuclear tensions rose amid Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, officials say. It is one of many Cold War relics built and then discarded decades ago.

Since at least the 1980s, Washington, like the federal government, decided the costs to plan for mass evacuations, and mass fallout shelters, were unreasonable, given the assumption that nuclear war would be unsurvivable.

Washington even passed a law in 1984 banning such spending, and exempting itself from liability, even though it is home to the world’s third-largest stockpile of warheads — over 1,120 — stored near the Trident nuclear submarine base on Hood Canal, making the state a likely target in a nuclear exchange.

The sudden escalation of nuclear tensions with Russia, however, is making some experts rethink the lack of emergency planning for a nuclear attack. Clear information could save lives, even in a nuclear strike, they say. Failing to plan for how these weapons impact the public only enables a lack of scrutiny over nuclear spending and policy.

During the Cold War, some officials argued nuclear preparations could actually escalate tensions with the Soviet Union, if leaders believed their populations to be better insulated from the consequences. Instead, the state adopted an “all-hazards” approach to emergencies that prepares first responders to aid in any disaster, with specialized plans for catastrophes like a once-in-a-century earthquake or volcanic eruption, but neither the city of Seattle nor the state has a nuclear response plan.

Nuclear defense is now largely relegated to international treaties and military doctrine intended to de-escalate and decrease nuclear materials based on the premise of mutually assured destruction. But this is a fragile premise.

“We have been living very dangerous,” said Frank von Hippel, a research physicist and professor of public and international affairs emeritus at Princeton specializing in nuclear arms control.

On Monday, a spokesperson for the Kremlin told PBS that Russia, which placed its nuclear forces on “special combat readiness” early in the Ukraine conflict, would only use its arsenal if it were faced with an existential threat. Russia did not specify how it would define this, and Western leaders have questioned its credibility.

“The Cold War didn’t really end, it just changed,” said Alex Wellerstein, a science historian and programmer at the Stevens Institute of Technology in New Jersey, who specializes in the history of nuclear weapons.

“When you get into all-or-nothing thinking, it doesn’t take seriously that this could happen. And, as a result, it doesn’t push people to push for changes or ask fundamental questions about what our spending on this ought to be — and what actions we should take.”

Is no plan a good plan?

In 1961, the September issue of Life magazine featured a man dressed in a metallic silver fallout suit, his head and fingers encapsulated in clear plastic, with the caption, “How You Can Survive Fallout.” Inside, a letter from President John F. Kennedy explained how Americans could protect their families from nuclear war, asserting 97% of the population could survive.

Congress appropriated \$207 million to build and stock public fallout shelters. This included a plan to construct them beneath freeways, like the one in Roosevelt, although Washington historians believe it to be the only one ever built. Civil defense planners constructed 867 shelters in Seattle in the 1950s and installed a 3-ton siren on Cherry Street. By 1965, an estimated 200,000 homeowners had their own private bunkers.

Within a decade, however, the federal programs would lapse alongside individual investments, with polls citing high costs and general skepticism about the effectiveness of public preparedness, according to archival research from the National Park Service.

For a time, state officials considered rapidly relocating the population of Seattle into Eastern Washington if under threat of a nuclear attack from the Soviet Union. But this was quickly discarded as infeasible. Hundreds of thousands of people would hardly make it to the highway in the minutes — not hours or days — between the warning of a nuclear strike and when a bomb would fall.

Michael Lindell, professor at the University of Washington’s Institute for Hazard Mitigation Planning and Research, remembers doing drop-and-cover drills in grade school in the 1950s, crawling below his desk and being instructed to cover his neck and hide his face.

“By the fall of the Berlin Wall I think everybody thought, ‘OK, that’s over now,’” he said.

Lindell helped devise emergency planning standards used by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and later international radiation emergency guides, but his research has since shifted to evacuation plans for hurricanes, wildfires and tsunamis. He maintains that clear and credible public information is key in any emergency.

“How likely is it that something bad is going to happen? How bad is it going to be? How soon is it going to happen? And how long is it going to last?” he said.

But as for planning for nuclear war, he recalled Soviet First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev, credited as saying that in the aftermath of such a war, “the living will envy the dead.”

City and state officials in Washington have also shifted focus away from survivability and instead emphasize the all-hazards doctrine and training for more conventional natural disasters.

“The most logical thing people can do if they are concerned is, do the preparedness they would for an earthquake,” said Robert Ezelle, director of the Washington Military Department’s Emergency Management Division. This includes two weeks of supplies of food and water and a plan for communicating with people outside the area.

Planning “bandwidth”

State and federal guidelines explicitly say that individuals, businesses and local entities must plan to rely on their own resources in the first three days after a disaster. Ezelle’s division and the state Department of Health are then charged with informing residents if they are in areas impacted by radiation and at risk of exposure.

However, in 1984, Washington state lawmakers imposed a prohibition against nuclear planning, including evacuations or relocation in response to a threat. That leaves Ezelle’s department unable to plan specifically for a nuclear attack.

The 1984 bill was passed during the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign, a Cold War-era movement to ban nuclear testing, production, or deployment; it was even part of the Democratic Party's presidential platform. Lawmakers unsuccessfully sought to remove the language from state law in 2017 — when nuclear tensions were high between North Korea's Kim Jong Un and President Donald Trump — so money could be spent to plan for nuclear emergencies.

Then-state Sen. Guy Palumbo, one of the sponsors of the repealed bill, told The Seattle Times at the time that legislators, “were dumbfounded we wouldn’t have contingency plans for any kind of harmful nightmare like that.”

Ezelle said taking on specific nuclear planning now would require more resources. His department currently has a planning staff of six, despite Washington being at risk for a slew of disasters. The agency, funded by the state and federal governments, had a budget of \$229 million in the two years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, and has more than doubled since.

“Our staff is extremely stressed ... there is only so much bandwidth,” Ezelle said. “It has certainly been a challenge, even before COVID, to deal with the magnitude of things on our plate from catastrophes to normal training.”

His division has been activated for the longest period on record due to the pandemic. When communities and first responders are this overtaxed, he said, it can make planning for such a rare and destructive event seem illogical.

The pandemic, however, exemplified the consequences of not preparing for even well-anticipated disasters. Private industry is unwilling to take on the cost of stockpiles, experts say, and extreme preparations, such as storing food and water for millions, were seen as less important than responding to other crises.

“The likelihood of a nuclear attack happening is extremely remote,” Ezelle said. “However the consequences of one happening would be cataclysmic and almost impossible to prepare for.”

Mark Henry, manager of the state Department of Health's office of radiation protection, said his division would monitor radiation released in an attack as it would for an accident at the Columbia Generating Station, Washington's single nuclear energy plant, or the Hanford nuclear reservation, the nation's largest repository of nuclear waste. It has radiation monitoring equipment and potassium iodide tablets, which temporarily block absorption of radioactive iodine in an emergency, for staff responding in the field.

Henry said the state dramatically improved planning for a radiological response since the '90s, and the 1984 prohibition has not impacted his division. However, larger nuclear planning is not much of a consideration because most of it is under federal authority, he said.

“There is a very, very strong robust response coalition of federal, state and local agencies every day looking at these things like radiation because they are radiation nerds,” he said. “It is why we exist, it is why we come to work every day.”

But rather than waiting for disaster, he said, people should “Wake up each day and be decisive about who you want to be for that day and find things that are real blessings in your life.”

“Right now we just need to live our lives,” he said.

What could happen

If an 800-kiloton-yield nuclear warhead were dropped on U.S. soil by an adversary, there would be the apocalyptic vision of blinding, fiery light as a mushroom cloud plume surged into the sky. It would be many magnitudes greater than the vision that caused Robert Oppenheimer, the so-called “father of the atomic bomb,” to recite Hindu scripture proclaiming, “Now, I am become death, the destroyer of worlds.”

Within this extraordinary impact and firestorm, everything would indeed be destroyed, alongside thousands, if not millions, of lives. But beyond the initial blast zone, the “fatality curve” would drop off steeply, said Wellerstein, the science historian.

A third of a mile from the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, which had a 15-kiloton yield, the fatality rate was 100%, but just under 3 miles from the center, it was less than 10%; the Hiroshima bomb was far smaller than many in modern nuclear arsenals.

“If you imagine it as a big flash of light and then you are dead, you are exempted from the consequences,” Wellerstein said. “Whereas if you imagine other scenarios you have to deal with what the next steps are.”

Taking precautions one might adopt in an earthquake — sheltering under secure structures, staying away from shattering windows — could save lives outside a certain range. Covering one’s skin from the initial surge of radiation, ideally with as many layers of cement and shielding as possible, could also improve long-term survival, according to estimates based on mortality charts from Hiroshima, which examined attendance rates from elementary schools encircling the city.

“You could save lives if more people prepare,” Wellerstein said. “It has helped me see these bombs as a localized phenomenon. It doesn’t mean they are not devastating ... But it isn’t that 100% of people would die.”

If a fairly large nuclear weapon that is currently in Russia’s arsenal were dropped at the Bangor nuclear submarine base, intended to destroy a military target, the blast would immediately kill roughly 18,400 people and injure 25,000 more, with fallout potentially stretching into Canada, depending on wind conditions, according to Wellerstein’s estimates. The estimate does not account for the consequences of a strike that triggered hundreds of warheads at the base.

In addition, the fallout plume would deposit radioactivity wherever the wind blows it, creating varying levels of exposure, but this could allow time for the government to inform the public if it is safer to leave or shelter, and for how long.

If the same bomb were dropped in the air over Seattle, as a civilian target, 261,000 people could be killed immediately, and 420,000 more injured, including radiation burns similar to Hiroshima and Nagasaki that could cause impossible strain on hospitals.

“People are tuned out and then find themselves surprised by nuclear weapons,” Wellerstein said. “But it shouldn’t be a surprise. We are spending a lot of money on this as a society.”

The United States sought \$43 billion for nuclear weapons spending for 2022 and \$50.9 billion for the upcoming fiscal year. The Congressional Budget Office estimates the Department of Defense and Department of Energy will increase spending up to \$634 billion through 2030 — roughly \$60 billion per year.

In contrast, federal programs for “countering weapons of mass destruction” and radiological emergency management have budgets of about \$508 million, said Princeton’s Von Hippel, which he called “an emotional reaction.”

“It was just basically viscerally rejected by the society,” he said.

That is self-evident in the abandonment of the Roosevelt shelter, unoccupied except for a recent period when people who were homeless managed to saw open the heavy iron door, move in, and tap into the generator for power. Even if it were functional today, it would only protect less than 0.01% of Seattle’s population from fallout.

	<p>What the United States — and Washington, by maintaining the 1984 prohibition — have been doing instead, von Hippel said, reminds him of an old Soviet joke he learned traveling to Russia during the 1980s.</p> <p>“They say, ‘if there is a nuclear war, put on a white sheet and walk, don’t run, to the nearest graveyard.’ ‘Why not run?’ ‘You don’t want to panic people.’”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/04 World leaders vow new sanctions
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/04/04/ukraine-Russians-kille-hundreds-civilians/2751649058948/
GIST	<p>April 4 (UPI) -- Ukrainian officials said hundreds of bodies of civilians have been found in liberated cities near the capital Kyiv as international anger mounts against Russia over its alleged war crimes with some world leaders saying they amount to genocide.</p> <p>Iryna Venediktova, Ukraine's prosecutor general, said Sunday on Facebook that 410 bodies of Ukrainian civilians have been removed from the Kyiv region since Friday.</p> <p>The bodies were found in Bucha, Irpin and other towns and villages recently liberated from retreating Kremlin troops, Ukraine's ministry of defense said.</p> <p>The announcement was made as Mykhailo Podolyak, an advisor to President Voldymyr Zelensky, posted graphic images on Twitter of bodies strewn about the streets of Bucha. Some of the images show a mass grave of people partially buried in a sand pit, others lying dead by the side of the road with their hands tied behind their backs.</p> <p>Video posted by the ministry of defense shows bodies of people it says were killed after being lined up against a wall on their knees.</p> <p>Podolyak called the Kyiv region a "21st century hell."</p> <p>"This is a planned genocide," he said in a tweet.</p> <p>"Bodies of men and women, who were killed with hands tied. The worst crimes of Nazism have returned to [Europe]," he said in another, calling on world leaders to impose an energy resource embargo on Russia. "Stop the murders!"</p> <p>Russia has rebuked the accusations by Podolyak as "fake," with its ministry of defense posting a statement to Telegram accusing Ukraine of being responsible for the mass grave and for having "deliberately laid out" bodies in the street "to create a more dramatic picture."</p> <p>However, world leaders have vowed to aid Ukraine in its push to prosecute and punish Russia and its leadership for war crimes.</p> <p>"The Russian authorities are responsible for these atrocities, committed while they had effective control of the area," the EU Council said in a statement on Monday. "They are subject to the international law of occupation."</p> <p>"The perpetrators of war crimes and other serious violations as well as the responsible government officials and military leaders will be held accountable. The European Union supports all measures to ensure accountability for human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law in Ukraine by Russian armed forces."</p>

Return to Top	<p>Early this month, an investigation was opened by the International Criminal Court into possible Russian war crimes committed in Ukraine going back to 2013, and the EU said Monday that it is in full support and was assisting Venediktova with the collection and preservation of evidence.</p> <p>Since Russia's invasion of Feb. 24, democratic nations have hit Moscow with steep sanctions that have already taken a bite out of its economy.</p> <p>With the new revelations of potential war crimes, the EU said it will advance further punitive measures against Russia "as a matter of urgency."</p> <p>Mateusz Morawiecki, the prime minister of Poland, said Monday that the "genocide" committed by Russia in Bucha "changes everything in the perception of this war," while calling for even stiffer sanctions to be imposed against Russia.</p> <p>"The time for calculations is over, the brutality of the totalitarian-fascist regime from Russia touches a growing group of Ukrainian citizens," he said on Facebook. "Instead of discussing human rights in warm conference rooms, start defending them finally!"</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Conscripts Donbas region sent to frontlines
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/conscripts-sent-fight-by-pro-russia-donbas-get-little-training-old-rifles-poor-2022-04-04/
GIST	<p>LONDON, April 4 (Reuters) - Military conscripts in the Russian-backed Donbas region have been sent into front-line combat against Ukrainian troops with no training, little food and water, and inadequate weapons, six people in the separatist province told Reuters.</p> <p>The new accounts of untrained and ill-equipped conscripts being deployed are a fresh indication of how stretched the military resources at the Kremlin's disposal are, over a month into a war that has seen Moscow's forces hobbled by logistical problems and held up by fierce Ukrainian resistance.</p> <p>One of the people, a student conscripted in late February, said a fellow fighter told him to prepare to repel a close-quarter attack by Ukrainian forces in southwest Donbas but "I don't even know how to fire an automatic weapon."</p> <p>The student and his unit fired back and evaded capture, but he was injured in a later battle. He did not say when the fighting took place.</p> <p>While some information indicating poor conditions and morale among Donbas conscripts has emerged in social media and some local media outlets, Reuters was able to assemble one of the most comprehensive pictures to date.</p> <p>Besides the student draftee, Reuters spoke to three wives of conscripts who have mobile phone contact with their partners, one acquaintance of a draftee, and one source close to the pro-Russian separatist leadership who is helping to organize supplies for the Donbas armed forces.</p> <p>Reuters verified the identity of the student, as well as the other sources and the draftees they are associated with. The news agency was unable to confirm independently the accounts of what happened to the men once they were drafted.</p> <p>The six sources all asked that their full names not be published, saying that they feared reprisals for speaking to foreign media.</p> <p>The Donbas armed forces are fighting alongside Russian soldiers but are not part of the Russian armed forces, which have different rules about which troops they send into combat.</p>

Several Donbas draftees have been issued with a rifle called a Mosin, which was developed in the late 19th century and went out of production decades ago, according to three people who saw conscripts from the separatist region using the weapon. Images shared on social media, that Reuters has not been able to verify independently, also showed Donbas fighters with Mosin rifles.

The student said he was forced to drink water from a fetid pond because of lack of supplies. Two other sources in contact with draftees also told Reuters the men had to drink untreated water.

Some Donbas conscripts were given the highly dangerous mission of drawing enemy fire onto themselves so other units could identify the Ukrainian positions and bomb them, according to one of the sources and video testimony from a prisoner of war published by Ukrainian forces.

Asked to comment about the treatment and low morale of the Donbass draftees, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said it was a question for the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR), the self-proclaimed separatist entity in Donbas. The Russian defence ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

A spokeswoman for the DNR administration, after viewing Reuters questions, said there would be no response on Friday. She did not say when the administration would reply. Messages left with a spokesman for the separatist military went unanswered.

After being pushed to the front line near the port of Mariupol -- scene of the heaviest fighting in the war -- a group of about 135 Donbas conscripts laid down their arms and refused to fight on, according to Veronika, the partner of a conscript, who said her husband was among them. Marina, partner of another conscript, said she had been in contact with a friend who was part of the same group.

"We're refusing (to fight)," the friend wrote in a text message to Marina, seen by Reuters.

The men were kept in a basement by military commanders as punishment, Veronika and Marina said. Commanders verbally threatened them with reprisals but subsequently allowed the group out of the basement, pulled them back from the front line and billeted them in abandoned homes, Veronika said.

Neither the Kremlin nor separatist authorities answered Reuters questions about the incident.

CALL-UP

All sides in the Ukraine war have systems of conscription, where young men are required by law to do military service.

Ukraine's government has declared a general mobilisation, meaning that conscripts and reservists have been deployed to fight.

Russia says it is not deploying conscripts in Ukraine, though it has acknowledged a small number were mistakenly sent to fight.

The Donetsk separatist authorities announced in late February they were drafting all fighting age men for immediate deployment.

Military recruitment officers appeared at workplaces around the Donetsk region and told employees to report for duty, while police ordered people in the streets to report to their local draft office, according to a Reuters reporter who was there in late February. Anyone not complying risks prosecution.

Reuters could not determine how many people have been called up, nor what proportion of Donbas forces is comprised of draftees.

None of the five draftees had prior military experience or training, and four of the five were given no training before they were sent into combat, according to the injured draftee, the three wives of conscripted men, and the acquaintance.

"He never served in the army," said one of the partners, who gave her name as Olga and lives in the town of Makeevka. "He doesn't even really know how to hold an automatic weapon."

Two of the wives said their partners were deployed to the front line, where they saw heavy fighting.

"I'm in the war," read a text message, seen by Reuters, that Marina, also from Makeevka, said came from her drafted husband.

Marina said she learned from messages from her husband that his unit, fighting in the Donbas region, was ordered to draw enemy fire on to themselves.

Ukrainian forces on March 12 published a video showing a prisoner of war. He said his name was Ruslan Khalilov, that he was a civil servant from Donbas and that he was sent with zero training to Mariupol where his role was to draw enemy fire to facilitate the bombing of Ukrainian targets.

A person in Donbas who knows Khalilov confirmed to Reuters his identity, that he was drafted and has no military training. Reuters established that the person knows Khalilov.

"SLAUGHTERHOUSE"

The student draftee who spoke to Reuters said that a day after reporting for duty he was put in a mortar unit then sent towards the fighting. "We were taught nothing," he wrote to Reuters via messenger app.

"Up to that point I had only seen mortars in movies. Obviously, I didn't know how to do anything with them."

He said that before he left, his unit had been under repeated attack by Ukrainian troops. "There were lots of casualties," he wrote. "I hate the war. I don't want it, curse it. Why are they sending me into a slaughterhouse?"

All the accounts gathered by Reuters mentioned an acute shortage of supplies. The sources described little or no safe drinking water, field rations for one man being shared among several, and units having to scavenge food.

"We drank water with dead frogs in it," said the student conscript.

"Supplies for the soldiers right now are a disaster," said the source close to the Donetsk separatist leadership, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Neither the Kremlin nor the separatist authorities replied to Reuters' questions about supplies and equipment for the draftees from Donbas.

WORLD WAR TWO RIFLE

The same source said some conscripts were issued with the Mosin rifle from reserve stocks that date back to the Second World War.

The student conscript said he has seen fellow fighters using the rifle: "It's like we're fighting with World War Two muskets."

A soldier in the Russian armed forces who is fighting near Mariupol told Reuters he had seen soldiers from the Donetsk separatist military carrying Mosin rifles.

	<p>A video posted on social media on Tuesday by Russian military journalist Semyon Pegov showed a man who said he was a Donbas draftee brandishing a Mosin rifle.</p> <p>Soon after the men were drafted in late February, many of their wives, mothers, and sisters started writing petitions to the separatist leadership, to Donbas draft offices, and to the Kremlin, describing their treatment and seeking help.</p> <p>"Bring us back our men," said one petition addressed to Russian President Vladimir Putin, seen by Reuters.</p> <p>The three wives of draftees who spoke to Reuters said they received no definitive answers.</p> <p>On March 11, about 100 women gathered outside the separatist administration's offices in Donetsk to demand answers, in a rare public show of dissent.</p> <p>Two women who took part in the gathering said Alexander Malkovsky, the head of the DNR draft office, came out and told them that men aged 18 to 27 would be exempted from the draft. Reuters couldn't determine if this has been implemented, and was unable to reach Malkovsky.</p> <p>Two of the conscripts' wives said that since the gathering they learned from their partners that conditions had improved: some units were pulled back from the front line and allowed to sleep in abandoned homes, instead of in trenches.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 China Covid crisis grows: surge in cases
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/china-covid-crisis-grows-with-cases-surgin-new-sub-strains/ar-AAVOX0W?ocid=uxbndlbing
GIST	<p>(Bloomberg) -- China's Covid-19 situation is on a knife's edge, with a lockdown of its financial hub <u>intensified</u> over the weekend amid a surge in new cases and reports of new sub-strains of the omicron variant emerging.</p> <p>The country, which managed to live much of the pandemic effectively virus free after quashing its initial outbreak in Wuhan, is experiencing its biggest jump in daily infections since 2020.</p> <p>Shanghai reported 9,006 cases for Sunday as the city prepares to test all its 25 million residents in another effort to weed out infections, amid accounts of un-reported deaths in a nursing home and ongoing food shortages. After announcing a partial lockdown a week ago, the uptick in cases now means Shanghai's entire population is now under some form of movement restrictions.</p> <p>Thousands of medical staff from around China have arrived in the city to help with testing, the Xinhua News Agency reported. The People's Liberation Army has also mobilized more than 2,000 military medics to support Shanghai's virus control efforts, according to the PLA Daily.</p> <p>Businesses and some factories remain shuttered, with Tesla Inc.'s Shanghai plant -- its first Gigafactory outside of the U.S. -- entering a second week of disrupted operations.</p> <p>Adding to concern about the situation is the emergence of what appears to be new sub-types of the highly contagious omicron strain.</p> <p>A Covid patient in a city some 40 miles from Shanghai was diagnosed with a new iteration of the virus that evolved from the BA.1.1 branch of omicron, the state-run Global Times newspaper reported at the weekend, citing sequencing data from local health authorities. The report said the sub-type doesn't match other strains in China, nor those submitted to GISAID, the global database for coronavirus sequencing and monitoring mutations.</p>

A case in Dalian city in northern China reported on Friday also didn't match any coronavirus found domestically, the municipal government said on its WeChat account.

With the situation spiraling, Beijing sent Vice Premier Sun Chunlan to Shanghai to oversee prevention efforts. Sun ordered local officials to curtail the outbreak "as soon as possible," indicating China remains wedded to its rigid Covid Zero stance despite the escalating crisis. For much of the pandemic the nation has sought to eliminate the virus, something that's become more challenging as the pathogen has mutated to become more transmissible, evading even the toughest border curbs and quarantine regimes.

mRNA Vaccines

Still, in further evidence Beijing is at least planning for an eventual exit from the strategy -- which has left it isolated as the rest of the world opens up -- two Chinese vaccines using messenger RNA technology, or mRNA, were approved to start clinical trials. More effective vaccines are seen as key to China being able to normalize without a high number of virus deaths, political anathema to President Xi Jinping's government.

China is the last country in the world to still be taking such a hard line with Covid, after other places that pursued elimination, including Singapore, Australia and New Zealand, started to open up once vaccination reached key levels.

The experience of Hong Kong is providing a cautionary tale for mainland officials, with the city going from virus success story to the highest death rate in the world at one point. Hong Kong didn't lock down and mass test its population, despite Beijing's urgings, and cases rapidly exploded into the tens of thousands within days, triggering an unprecedented wave of death mostly among the under-vaccinated elderly community.

China's elderly vaccination rates are better than Hong Kong's, but still low by global standards, particularly among the very old. Just over half of those aged 80 and older are fully vaccinated against Covid in China, officials said March 18, before launching a push to get more older people to get shots.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/03 Masks off, mandates, work protocols loosen
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/masks-come-off-mandates-loosen-as-companies-relax-covid-19-protocols-11648980181?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1
GIST	<p>U.S. companies are relaxing many of the vaccine and other Covid-related requirements that had become a staple of corporate life in the pandemic.</p> <p>As office occupancy nears pandemic-era highs in many U.S. cities, a number of employers have communicated new, looser safety protocols to workers. Some companies made masks optional in the office for all workers, while others dropped testing requirements for the unvaccinated or simplified the daily return-to-office questionnaires.</p> <p>The new protocols in many cases follow updated guidance from health authorities, who have moved away from blanket preventive measures in favor of a more targeted approach focused on limiting infection and severe illness in high-risk areas. Infections have edged up again in the U.S. and the Omicron BA.2 variant accounts for more new Covid-19 cases.</p> <p>JPMorgan Chase & Co. told U.S. employees in mid-March that masking in its corporate office buildings would be voluntary for both vaccinated and unvaccinated employees. The company also said that as of April 4, it planned to discontinue other measures such as mandatory testing for the unvaccinated or asking employees to report Covid-19 infections. It added that it would discontinue its policy of hiring only vaccinated individuals.</p>

In a memo from the company's return-to-office task force, executives noted that across the U.S., "we are learning to live with COVID as part of our new normal." JPMorgan Chase still insists that those feeling sick stay home and said free at-home tests would remain available. It also kept open the possibility that it could reintroduce protocols, if needed.

"Masking requirements may return if there is another spike in cases, or a variant begins to spread that causes severe illness in the general population," the company said. "But this will only happen based on strict criteria or if mandated by state or local government authorities."

Some large U.S. companies, including Boeing Corp., suspended vaccine requirements for U.S. employees late last year in response to legal rulings on vaccine mandates. Others have allowed some unvaccinated workers to return, while maintaining broader vaccine policies. United Airlines Holdings Inc. in recent weeks said it would allow back unvaccinated employees who got religious or medical exemptions from the company's Covid-19 vaccine mandate.

Many human-resources executives say they updated their company's protocols in response to a loosening of mask and vaccine mandates in U.S. cities, and after new guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC in late February eased mask guidelines and changed the metrics it uses to assess risk.

At Verizon Communications Inc., the company loosened mask policies last month at many of its sites following the CDC's recommendations. Verizon told employees that those working in areas with a high level of community transmission, as defined by the CDC, would still be required to wear a mask regardless of vaccination status, while masks would be voluntary in medium or low areas.

The company also simplified a return-to-office questionnaire: Employees must certify that they aren't sick with Covid in what is now a one-question survey. Verizon's return-to-office tool will tell workers if they are required to wear a mask in a given location. The company's hybrid-work policy takes full effect this week, and employees working in U.S. corporate offices will be expected to come into offices on a schedule that they have set with their teams.

Nationally, offices are beginning to fill up once more. Offices in 10 major U.S. cities were, on average, 40% occupied in late March, near a pandemic-era peak, according to badge-swipe data from security company Kastle Systems.

Some workers say they remain hypervigilant about the pandemic and nervous about the lifting of safeguards, particularly as cases tick up.

Lance Lambert, a Los Angeles vice president of marketing for a company that makes equipment used in the cannabis industry, has been traveling internationally on business trips in recent months. During a trip to a conference in Barcelona last month, Mr. Lambert noticed that the event appeared more crowded than before the pandemic. Some people he encountered had abandoned masks and appeared "over it," Mr. Lambert said, while Covid remained in the back of his mind during each interaction.

"Does he have any symptoms? Is he coughing? Does he look hot, sweaty?" Mr. Lambert said he thought when meeting people at the conference. "It is hard to take that away from your mind."

Many companies are also taking a wait-and-see approach, wanting to hold off on ratcheting up protocols again until more is known about any new uptick in cases. Minneapolis law firm Lockridge Grindal Nauen last year mandated that its 100-person staff get vaccinated, barring an exemption for medical or religious reasons, and nearly all employees also got booster shots. The firm reinstituted a mask mandate in its office in December as cases surged but would likely wait for Minneapolis to restore an indoor mask mandate or for cases to dramatically increase before doing so again, said Susan E. Ellingstad, a partner at the firm.

"It would be different if we didn't have everyone vaccinated," Ms. Ellingstad said, adding she also plans to keep watching the city's positivity rate to adjust any policies, if needed.

	<p>Some employers say flexibility is key if executives hope to avoid the challenges of shifting policies during each stage of the pandemic. Software developer Atlassian Corp. is embracing a model it calls “team anywhere,” allowing all staffers to do their jobs remotely. Annie Dean, a vice president at the company, said requiring employees back to offices a specific number of days invites problems, particularly if some employees remain anxious about the pandemic. Ms. Dean previously worked as the first-ever head of remote work at Facebook.</p> <p>At companies that mandate returns, many HR executives must ask themselves questions with each successive Covid wave, such as: “What are we going to do about our vaccine policy? What are we going to do about our three-day in-office policy? How are we going to ask people to get back in the office—should we extend that another three months?” Ms. Dean said. “There’s a lot of heartache and heartburn for companies.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	04/04 Russia forces ‘butchers, rapists, looters’
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/04/russia-ukraine-war-news-putin-live-updates/
GIST	<p>Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called Russian forces “butchers, rapists and looters” and appealed to the international community for help investigating alleged war crimes, as haunting images emerged over the weekend of bodies lining the streets and what appeared to be mass graves as Moscow’s troops withdrew from suburbs surrounding Kyiv.</p> <p>Responding to the signs of a massacre in Bucha, northwest of the Ukrainian capital, several top European officials on Sunday said they planned to impose tighter economic sanctions against Russia. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who is set to travel to Brussels this week for talks with NATO officials, condemned the “apparent atrocities by Kremlin forces” and vowed to use “every tool available” to pursue and hold those responsible accountable. The Biden administration is also weighing tougher sanctions. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson pledged to do “everything in my power to starve Putin’s war machine.”</p> <p>The calls for retribution came as Russian President Vladimir Putin appeared to be regrouping and shifting his focus away from Kyiv, toward the country’s south and east, setting the stage for a new phase in the conflict that military analysts warn could be long and bloody. Explosions rocked Odessa early Sunday, in the first major strikes on the strategic Black Sea port city, and missile strikes were also reported in the southern port city of Mykolaiv.</p> <p>Here’s what to know</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video posted to social media on Saturday and verified by The Washington Post showed bodies on the streets of Bucha. Journalists with The Post and other news organizations found that the hands of some of the deceased had been bound. Ukraine’s prosecutor general said a task force has found the bodies of more than 400 civilians in the Kyiv region. • NATO’s secretary general described the alleged Kremlin atrocities as “brutality against civilians we haven’t seen in Europe for decades.” • Russian officials denied harming civilians in Bucha and attempted to discredit extensive reporting documenting a strike on a maternity hospital in Mariupol.
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	04/03 Some states face rise Covid cases
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/03/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine?type=style&live-updates&label=coronavirus%20updates&index=0#as-the-average-number-of-new-us-cases-remains-low-some-states-are-seeing-known-infections-increase
GIST	<p>Across the United States, officials have dropped mask mandates and are closing mass vaccine and testing sites as new coronavirus cases have fallen nationally to about 27,000 a day on average. But several states — mostly in the Northeast — have had some increases in case numbers over the past two weeks, according to a New York Times database</p>

Though their average number of new cases remains much lower than during the winter Omicron surge, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts and Connecticut have seen cases jump by more than 40 percent over the latest 14-day period as of Saturday, according to the Times database.

Some other states have also seen slight upticks in new cases over the past two weeks, including Illinois (13 percent); New Hampshire (19 percent); Delaware (17 percent); Wisconsin (11 percent); and Florida (25 percent), the Times database shows.

Those shifts come as the highly transmissible Omicron subvariant known as BA.2, which had led to cases increasing in Europe, became the dominant version of the coronavirus among new cases in the United States, according to federal estimates last week. BA.2 is similar to the form of Omicron that recently swept the United States over the winter.

“We are in a watch-and-see period, unfortunately, because so many states have removed mitigation, and so many people are fatigued by said mitigation,” Bertha Hidalgo, an associate professor of epidemiology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, said when asked recently about the current state of the pandemic in the United States.

Some U.S. health officials have said they expected case numbers to rise without a major surge caused by BA.2, though at-home test results are not always officially reported. Still, other scientists worry that the nation isn’t doing enough to prevent another possible surge.

“Cases are ticking up as we thought they might,” President Biden said last week as he called for Congress to approve stalled emergency aid, adding that “Americans are back to living their lives again. We can’t surrender that now.”

But Senate Democrats and Republicans were nearing an agreement that would slash the Covid response package to \$10 billion, from \$15.6 billion.

Dr. Hidalgo said that a new surge could potentially increase hospitalizations in some parts of the country, particularly in places where a majority of eligible people have not received a booster shot of a coronavirus vaccine. Federal health officials cleared second boosters for some people last week, and scientists have cautioned that future variants may be better able to sidestep our defenses.

“We cannot be cavalier about this virus,” Dr. Hidalgo said, adding, “We need mitigation, a push for vaccination and overall a preventive approach instead of a reactive approach to prevent additional cases this time.”

Vaccines continue to protect against the worst outcomes, but only about 60 percent of Americans over 65 have had a first booster shot, according to federal data. That leaves many people vulnerable, said Dr. Jeffrey Klausner, a professor of medicine at the University of Southern California, though the emergence of new treatments, such as an antibody drug for people with weakened immune systems, and antiviral pills, kept him optimistic.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/03 Pro-Putin leaders Hungary, Serbia elections
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/03/world/europe/pro-putin-leaders-in-hungary-and-serbia-election.html
GIST	<p>BUDAPEST — Overshadowed by the war in Ukraine, elections on Sunday in Hungary and Serbia appear to have extended the tenures of Europe’s two most Kremlin-friendly leaders, both populist strongmen fortified by their overwhelming control of the media and cheap energy from Russia.</p> <p>With more than 60 percent of the votes counted in Hungary, preliminary results indicated that Viktor Orban, Hungary’s prime minister since 2010, and already Europe’s longest serving leader, had won a</p>

fourth consecutive term despite accusations by the opposition that he has enabled Russia's military onslaught by cozying up for years to President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia.

"We won a victory so big that you can perhaps see it from the moon, and certainly from Brussels," Mr. Orban told a jubilant crowd of supporters late Sunday, taking a dig at the European Union, which he has long accused of pushing L.G.B.T.Q. and migrant rights in defiance of the democratic will of Hungarian voters.

The preliminary results dashed the hopes of Mr. Orban's political foes that an unusually united opposition camp could break his ruling Fidesz party's increasingly authoritarian grip on the Central European nation next to Ukraine.

Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, speaking early Sunday in his capital, Kyiv, described Mr. Orban as "virtually the only one in Europe to openly support Mr. Putin."

Asked about Mr. Zelensky's assessment after casting his vote in Budapest on Sunday morning, Mr. Orban said curtly: "Mr. Zelensky is not voting today. Thank you. Are there any other questions?"

President Aleksandar Vucic of Serbia, also Moscow-friendly, has governed Serbia since 2012, and was expected to win re-election after rallying his nationalist and pro-Russian base by refusing to join the European Union in imposing sanctions on Russia. Serbia hopes to become a member of the European bloc, but its application has stalled.

An unusually high turnout in Serbia of nearly 60 percent forced officials to keep polling stations open late into the evening in some areas. Amid complaints of foul play by the opposition, the central election commission in Belgrade, the capital, said it would not issue results until Monday morning.

But exit polls indicated that Mr. Vucic would win a new term as president and that his Serbian Progressive Party would retain its hold on Parliament, albeit with a reduced majority. The opposition said it had won control of the municipal government in Belgrade.

Hungary and Serbia have very different histories. Mr. Orban governs a country that, until he came to power, viewed Russia with great distrust as a result of its past suffering at Russia's hands, most notably when Moscow sent troops to brutally crush an anti-communist uprising in 1956. Mr. Vucic's nation, however — Slavic and Orthodox Christian, like Russia — has long looked to Moscow as its ally and protector.

But under the two strongmen leaders, both countries have over the past decade drastically reduced the space for critical media voices, turning television stations with national reach into propaganda bullhorns and moving toward authoritarian rule. Each has cultivated close ties with Mr. Putin, who endorsed the Hungarian leader's election campaign when he visited Moscow in February shortly before the invasion of Ukraine.

Serbia declined to impose sanctions on Russia while Hungary, a member of the European Union since 2004, agreed to an initial round of European sanctions but has strongly resisted extending them to include restrictions on energy imports from Russia.

In contrast to leaders in neighboring Poland, previously a close ally of Mr. Orban thanks to their shared hostility to liberal values, the Hungarian leader has also refused to let weapons destined for Ukraine pass through his country.

Before Hungary's election, Mr. Orban hit back to counter opposition charges that his policy on Ukraine had betrayed not only foreign allies but also Hungary's own painful memories of aggression by Russia. Mr. Orban mobilized the news media, most of which is controlled by the state and by friendly tycoons, to cast his opponents as warmongers bent on sending Hungarian troops to fight against Russia. The election offered a "choice between war and peace," pro-government media warned.

The campaign seems to have worked, even among some older voters who remember the suffering caused by Moscow's troops in 1956. "Why should Hungarian boys fight for Ukraine?" asked Janos Dioszegi, who was 13 at the time of the Hungarian uprising and whose father was imprisoned for 14 years by Soviet-backed authorities for his part in the anti-Moscow uprising. He said "of course" he chose Mr. Orban's Fidesz party when he voted in Nagykovacsi, a small town near Budapest.

Echoing a line frequently aired in Fidesz-controlled media outlets, Mr. Dioszegi said there was no need to help Ukraine defend itself because it had provoked the war by becoming "a military base for America."

Until Mr. Putin sent troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24, the centerpiece of Mr. Orban's election campaign was an inflammatory referendum, timed for the day of the parliamentary election, on whether young children should be taught in school about gender transition surgery treatment, and exposed without restriction to sexually explicit material.

The war next door in Ukraine, however, derailed Mr. Orban's effort to get voters to focus on transgender individuals and gays, forcing a reboot focused on painting his opponents as eager to take Hungary to war.

When hundreds of pro-Ukrainian Hungarians and refugees from Ukraine gathered on Saturday in central Budapest to denounce the government's fence-sitting on the war, the main state-controlled television station, M1, described the event as a "pro-war rally." Anna Olishevskaya, a 24-year-old Ukrainian from Kyiv who took part, praised the ordinary Hungarians who she said had helped her after she fled across the border. More than 500,000 Ukrainians have crossed into Hungary over the past month, far fewer than the more than two million who have entered Poland but still a large number for a country where venomous hostility to foreign migrants had long been the cornerstone of Mr. Orban's often xenophobic political platform.

While delighted by her reception in Hungary, Ms. Olishevskaya said the government had been so tentative in condemning Russia's invasion and resistant to helping Ukraine defend itself, that she worries about staying in Hungary if Mr. Orban won another term.

"I can't stay in a country where the government supports Russia," she said, waving a hand-painted sign telling Mr. Putin where to stick his rockets.

Some prominent supporters of Mr. Orban's party have even blamed Ukraine for the bloodshed in 1956, with Maria Schmidt, a historian and museum director, claiming falsely on Saturday that Nikita S. Khrushchev, the Soviet leader who ordered troops into Hungary that year, was Ukrainian. He was Russian. Ms. Schmidt misrepresented the Soviet leader's origins in response to a tweet by the British comedian John Cleese, who urged Hungarian voters to consider whether it was Russia or Ukraine that invaded Hungary in 1956.

The blizzard of distortions and falsehoods in Hungarian news media outlets controlled by Fidesz has left opposition supporters in despair.

"They just repeat lies over and over, day after day," Judit Barna, 81, a doctor, said outside a central Budapest polling station, where she had just voted for a united opposition ticket headed by Peter Marki Zay, a conservative small town mayor.

Referring to Mr. Orban's early political career as an anti-Moscow firebrand who in 1989 demanded that Soviet troops leave, she asked: "How is it possible after 40 years of Soviet occupation and 30 years of democracy that the same guy who once shouted, 'Russians, go home' can now say that Russia is fighting a just war in Ukraine?"

Thanks to Fidesz's stranglehold on the media, she added: "Half of Hungary's population eats up all these lies. This is Hungary's shame."

HEADLINE	04/03 Sri Lanka cabinet resigns en masse
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/03/world/asia/sri-lanka-protests-curfew.html
GIST	<p>COLOMBO, Sri Lanka — Sri Lanka’s cabinet resigned en masse on Sunday amid street protests and a dire economic crisis, the outgoing health minister said, leading to a vacuum in the leadership of a country largely controlled by its president’s powerful family.</p> <p>Every member of the cabinet except for President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his brother, Mahinda Rajapaksa, the prime minister and onetime president, stepped down.</p> <p>The ministers “took a collective decision to resign,” said the outgoing health minister, Keheliya Rambukwella.</p> <p>The midnight resignations occurred as protesters swarmed streets across Sri Lanka’s capital, Colombo, and its suburbs, and at a university in the central city of Kandy. Driven by a crushing economic crisis that has resulted in food and energy shortages, protesters defied a state of emergency and risked arrest to take part in demonstrations.</p> <p>Such protests would have been unimaginable just a few months ago. Mr. Rajapaksa and his family have ruled the country largely through fear, based on accusations of wartime atrocities they perpetrated during Sri Lanka’s decades-long civil war.</p> <p>The Sri Lankan president has the power to appoint new cabinet members, and a high-level meeting was underway in the early hours of Monday morning.</p> <p>Among the 26 departing cabinet members were two of the president’s relatives: his brother Basil Rajapaksa, the much-criticized finance minister; and Namal Rajapaksa, his nephew and the son of the prime minister, Mahinda Rajapaksa. The younger Rajapaksa was widely viewed as the presumed heir of the family’s dynastic politics, but he has struggled to distance himself from the perceived failings of his father and uncles. It was unclear how his departure would affect his political future.</p> <p>“The fear factor is definitely not working the way it used to,” said Alan Keenan, a Sri Lanka consultant at the International Crisis Group, “though repression remains an option. Sri Lanka is not out of the woods.”</p> <p>Ranil Wickremesinghe, who served as Sri Lanka’s prime minister after Mahinda Rajapaksa lost re-election in 2015 and until Gotabaya Rajapaksa came to power in 2019, told reporters Sri Lanka was having its own “Arab Spring.”</p> <p>In the middle-class suburb of Rajagiriya, demonstrators defied the ban on public assemblies, protesting quietly to try to avoid provoking the security services and holding signs that read, “Enough is enough” and, “Go home, Gota,” referring to the president’s nickname. Some sang Sri Lanka’s national anthem, while others held the hands of their children or waved the country’s flag.</p> <p>“Regardless of this emergency that they have put, we are having a silent meeting here to showcase that we know our constitutional rights,” said Uttunga Jayawardana, 31, a logistics business owner, who was taking part in the demonstration.</p> <p>Rifle-armed troops and police officers stationed at checkpoints dissuaded a big march planned through Colombo. Still, more than 100 people followed opposition politicians toward the home of the opposition leader, Sajith Premadasa. They were stopped at barricades near Independence Square, a regular gathering place for protesters at the center of the city.</p> <p>Mr. Rajapaksa had declared a 36-hour state of emergency on Saturday in hopes of preventing the demonstrations. The government also blocked social media access, a move that set off a rare show of dissent within the Rajapaksa family, which has stamped its name on the Sri Lankan government. Namal</p>

Rajapaksa, the outgoing minister of sport, used a virtual private network, or VPN, to remark on Twitter earlier in the day that the ban was “completely useless.”

The government’s ban on protests in Sri Lanka inspired one in London, where about 300 people marched outside the Sri Lankan embassy carrying signs accusing President Rajapaksa of being a thief.

“There is no electricity, no jobs, no food, no fuel. Sri Lanka is a beautiful country. We must get back what the government stole from us,” said Shirani Fernando, one of the London demonstrators.

The government’s restrictions on internet access and public movement followed the Thursday protest that involved thousands of people outside Mr. Rajapaksa’s residence in suburban Colombo, an initially peaceful demonstration that turned violent when security forces deployed tear gas and water cannons, according to local news outlets.

Protesters responded by throwing stones and setting fire to buses used by the security forces. Two dozen police officers were injured. More than 50 people were taken into custody, including eight journalists, a government spokesman said on Friday.

Soon after the arrests, some of those in custody claimed that they had been tortured. In a display of support for the protesters, about 300 lawyers volunteered to represent, free of charge, those who had been detained.

Fliers distributed by protest organizers over the weekend urged people to defy the curfew and demonstrate as planned on Sunday. On Saturday, the police allowed some protests to take place, despite the emergency order.

The protesters say they are angry and frustrated over the dwindling standard of living in Sri Lanka as the country experiences a severe economic crisis, marked by cuts in electricity service that have lasted as long as 13 hours a day.

Sri Lanka’s tourism-reliant economy was hit hard after the Easter Sunday bombings of 2019, which killed more than 250 people in churches and hotels. After Mr. Rajapaksa won elections that November, he introduced a sweeping tax cut, and the coronavirus pandemic that soon followed put pressure on the currency, the Sri Lankan rupee.

The central bank decided to peg the rupee to the dollar, rather than continuing to let it float. Analysts say that created a parallel black market and arbitrage opportunities that sent the value of Sri Lanka’s sovereign debt into free fall. At the same time, the country’s foreign reserves dropped to dangerous lows, making it hard to purchase essential imports, including medicine, gas and fuel.

Allies of Mr. Rajapaksa, whose family has dominated Sri Lanka politics for many years, have rebelled. Several political parties in his governing coalition, which has a two-thirds majority in Parliament, have demanded that he appoint a caretaker government consisting of all 11 parties represented in the legislature.

The Sri Lanka Freedom Party declared at a meeting on Friday that it would abandon the governing coalition, said Rohana Lakshman Piyadasa, a senior member of the party, unless the government moved to “alleviate the economic crisis, after which an election must be called for.”

How Mr. Rajapaksa responds to the public protests in defiance of his emergency order will be watched closely as a measure of how much, or how little, he has changed since his family was last in power.

Mr. Rajapaksa was defense secretary and his brother Mahinda was president during the brutal final phase of Sri Lanka’s long civil war. The Rajapaksas were widely credited with bringing the war to a close. But they were also accused by victims supported by United Nations inquiries of war crimes and other abuses.

	<p>The family had held power for a decade, until 2015, when they were voted out of office. Their last few years in government were marked by frequent abductions of opponents, who were often bundled away into white vans, never to be seen again.</p> <p>After the devastating Easter terrorist attacks, security concerns were thrust to the forefront of public consciousness, creating an opening in the elections for Mr. Rajapaksa and his family to return to power.</p> <p>In Rajagiriya, protesters said that what they most wanted from the Rajapaksas was the humility to recognize their missteps.</p> <p>“They need to come to the streets and say, ‘We made bad decisions, but we hear you, we feel you. Let us come together and fix this problem.’ They’re not doing that. They’re showing a strong hand and suppressing the people,” Mr. Jayawardana, the protester, said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 US, Europe outrage over civilians killed
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/03/world/dead-civilians-bucha-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>Western officials expressed outrage on Sunday at videos and images emerging from Bucha, a town near Kyiv, that appeared to show civilian bodies scattered on the streets after Russia withdrew its troops from the area in recent days.</p> <p>Footage posted by Ukraine’s Defense Ministry and photographs from news agencies showed the bodies of men in civilian clothes lying on the streets of Bucha, northwest of Kyiv. Some images showed bodies with their hands bound behind their backs.</p> <p>Russia’s Ministry of Defense called the images “staged,” saying in a statement Sunday that “not a single” civilian had been injured in Bucha.</p> <p>Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said in an interview on CNN that the images were in line with the Biden administration’s warnings that Russian forces would commit abuses.</p> <p>“You can’t help but see these images as a punch to the gut, and look, we’ve said before Russia’s aggression that we thought it was likely that they would commit atrocities,” Mr. Blinken said, adding: “We can’t become numb to this. We can’t normalize this. This is the reality of what’s going on every single day.”</p> <p>Ukraine’s foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, said the accounts of civilian deaths in Bucha showed “that Russian hatred towards Ukrainians is beyond anything Europe has seen since WWII.” He reiterated a call for increased sanctions against Russia and for more military assistance for his country.</p> <p>“The only way to stop this: help Ukraine kick Russians out as soon as possible,” he tweeted.</p> <p>He also called for an investigation by the International Criminal Court to gather evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity. U.S. and British officials said that their governments would help collect evidence to assist investigators.</p> <p>President Emmanuel Macron of France called the images “unbearable.”</p> <p>“In the streets, hundreds of civilians were murdered in a cowardly way,” Mr. Macron said in a message posted on Twitter on Sunday, adding, “The Russian authorities will have to answer for these crimes.”</p> <p>The outrage could move the needle in terms of European sanctions against Russia. The European Union has so far rebuffed calls from both Ukraine and President Joe Biden to impose sanctions on Russian oil and gas, citing the bloc’s dependency on Russian fuels. But on Sunday, Germany’s defense minister voiced a significant shift in her country’s position. The defense minister, Christine Lambrecht, said on a</p>

	<p>German TV program that the bloc should consider banning Russian gas imports in light of the Bucha atrocities.</p> <p>Charles Michel, the president of the European Council, expressed his shock over the images and said in a tweet that more European Union sanctions against Russia “are on their way.”</p> <p>Several other European officials expressed their alarm at the images from Bucha.</p> <p>Roberta Metsola, the president of the European Parliament, said on Twitter that the images were “cold reality of Putin’s war crimes,” adding that the world “must be aware of what is happening.”</p> <p>Analysts say that while war crimes cases can be brought before the International Criminal Court at the Hague, it would be extremely difficult to hold Russian leaders to account there because the court lacks enforcement powers. Prosecution at the International Court of Justice is also possible, but any ruling would need to be enforced by the United Nations Security Council, where Russia holds veto power.</p> <p>American lawmakers said the reports from Bucha justified further assistance to Ukraine, with some calling for the provision of more surface-to-air missiles to help Ukrainian forces. Senator Rob Portman, Republican of Ohio, said that “we need to do more to help Ukraine, and we need to do more quickly.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 Border braces for record chaos
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/3/border-braces-record-chaos-biden-ends-pandemic-shu/
GIST	<p>Sen. Bill Hagerty was with Border Patrol agents Friday when news of the Biden administration’s decision to cancel the pandemic emergency and reopen the border to illegal immigrants was announced at evening muster.</p> <p>The Tennessee Republican said a “cloud of depression” fell over agents as their worst fears were realized. Already near-record levels of border arrests, at about 8,000 a day, could surge to 18,000, according to Homeland Security’s own contingency planning.</p> <p>And the one tool agents felt they had to combat the numbers — the Title 42 border policy, which had allowed the Border Patrol to immediately expel about half of all illegal border jumpers — will disappear on May 23, the government announced Friday.</p> <p>“The level of discouragement and depression is just unbelievable,” Mr. Hagerty told The Washington Times, recounting a three-day border visit.</p> <p>Mr. Hagerty showed up on the border in Texas just as the Biden administration in Washington was revealing it had made the decision to end Title 42, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention finding that illegal immigration across the border was a serious risk for spread of COVID-19.</p> <p>The Biden administration now says that with COVID-19 infection rates lower than their peak, and with migrants able to get vaccines at the border courtesy of U.S. taxpayers, the risk of spread is low enough to end the emergency, effective in late May.</p> <p>Migrants who were immediately expelled under Title 42 will now have a chance to argue for admission, which experts say will fuel a new wave of people making the attempt.</p> <p>U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s entire bed capacity at the end of February was about 20,000, which means at the worst-case scenario Homeland Security anticipates, it would be gone in a single day — not including all the other people already held, or those being arrested in the interior.</p>

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas insisted the government is preparing for what's to come, surging personnel to process and release the migrants, with the hope they show up for their court hearings.

"Nonetheless, we know that smugglers will spread misinformation to take advantage of vulnerable migrants. Let me be clear: those unable to establish a legal basis to remain in the United States will be removed," he said.

Border experts say it's not misinformation — those who arrive and make asylum claims, even dubious ones, will have a good chance of being caught and released, earning a chance to burrow into communities.

"When they take away Title 42, there literally will be no defense left down there, and no deportation either in the United States. And asylum will be available to everybody," said Todd Bensman, national security fellow at the Center for Immigration Studies. "It'll literally be the truest definition of open borders that we've ever had."

Over the last two years, more than 1.7 million border jumpers were blocked from entering the U.S. under Title 42.

The policy's critics say it was tainted from the start by the Trump administration, which used it as an excuse for a border shutdown they'd long sought.

Immigrant-rights advocates say among the 1.7 million expulsions are some legitimate asylum-seekers who have been sent back across the border to Mexico or, in some cases, all the way to their home countries.

Human Rights First, an advocacy group, says it has documented thousands of cases of migrants pushed back into Mexico who were kidnapped, raped or suffered other violent attacks.

Now, they will have a chance to make their asylum claims.

Immigration activists cheered the Biden administration's decision, but also slammed the president's team for keeping the policy in place so long in the first place.

"We will not forget the lives lost and those harmed by this illegal and racist policy," said Lisa Parisio, director of advocacy at the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.

The problem for the Biden administration is that the border is already in chaos, even before a Title 42 surge.

Border Patrol agents made 8,063 arrests last Wednesday, which was two days before the Title 42 announcement.

Mr. Bensman said the heightened levels are because Mexico had been bottling people up Tapachula, near its own southern border with Guatemala. But now Mexico is releasing them at a rate of about a thousand or so a day, and they're making their way north.

When Title 42 fully ends, he expects things to get worse.

"Whatever it's going to be will be beyond anything in the American experience," Mr. Bensman said.

Under the Trump administration, during the pandemic, nearly 85% of people apprehended by the Border Patrol were expelled under Title 42. Agents averaged fewer than 48,000 apprehensions per month during that period.

Under President Biden, Title 42 expulsions dropped to 56% of Border Patrol arrests, and with more people being caught and released, more people are attempting to come. Agents averaged nearly 168,000 arrests a month under Mr. Biden, or three times the flow under President Trump.

Brandon Judd, president of the National Border Patrol Council, said he expects 13,000 to 14,000 arrests a day, with 18,000 a real possibility.

Homeland Security says 18,000 is its worst-case contingency. It's also planning for a 12,000-a-day scenario.

Mr. Hagerty said for agents, the math is grim.

Right now it takes agents about 15 minutes to do the paperwork for a migrant who's going to be expelled under Title 42. Processing someone under the usual immigration laws, known as Title 8, takes about 75 minutes, or five times as long as a pandemic expulsion.

Agents told the senator that ending Title 42 means agents will now do "nothing other than paperwork."

That means even fewer agents on the line trying to stop the most dangerous cargo — drugs and serious criminals who are paying cartels premium prices to be snuck into the U.S. without detection by the Border Patrol.

While many Democrats on Capitol Hill cheered the Title 42 announcement, some expressed dismay.

Sen. Joe Manchin III, West Virginia Democrat, called it "a frightening decision," given the likely surge of people.

"We are nowhere near prepared to deal with that influx," he said.

Sens. Kyrsten Sinema and Mark Kelly, both Arizona Democrats, had also complained that the Biden administration lacked a specific plan to deal with the border absent Title 42.

Mr. Kelly is up for reelection later this year and Sen. Mitt Romney, Utah Republican, took to Twitter on Friday to say he figures Mr. Kelly will lose his seat because of this decision. So will Nevada Democratic Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, Mr. Romney predicted.

The decision to end Title 42 comes even as the Biden administration is begging Congress for tens of billions of dollars in new money to fight the pandemic, and warning of disastrous consequences from the virus if the money isn't forthcoming.

Sen. Richard Burr, North Carolina Republican, called the Biden message on COVID-19 "a contradictory mess."

Legal experts say they expect GOP-led states to go to court to try to stop the change, which could delay implementation.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/03 Airlines cancel 3,300+ flights over weekend
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/3/airlines-cancel-more-than-3300-us-flights-over-wee/
GIST	<p>Airlines have canceled more than 3,300 U.S. flights this weekend and delayed thousands more, citing weather in Florida and other issues.</p> <p>FlightAware, a website that tracks flights, noted major disruptions at several Florida airports, including Miami, Ft. Lauderdale and Orlando, as well as Baltimore and other airports around the country. JetBlue, Southwest, Alaska Airlines, Frontier, Spirit and American Airlines were most affected, according to</p>

FlightAware. Local news reported storms in Florida on Saturday. Several airlines said Sunday that operations are returning to normal.

The spate of cancellations arrived as air travel is rebounding from the pandemic, with strong demand for spring-break flights.

“Severe weather in the Southeast and multiple air traffic control delay programs have created significant impacts on the industry,” a JetBlue spokesperson said in an email. “Today’s cancellations will help us reset our operation and safely move our crews and aircraft back in to position.”

Southwest Airlines also cited “weather and airspace congestion” Saturday in Florida, as well as a “technology issue.” It canceled about 1,000 flights over the weekend but said that as of 1 p.m. Eastern, it had no more cancellations on Sunday.

American said Florida weather Saturday affected its operations, and it was recovering today.

Alaska Airlines said its weekend flight cancellations that began Friday have affected more than 37,000 customers and said Sunday that further cancellations were possible. The airline declined to say why it canceled flights, but referred in its statement to contract negotiations with its pilots. Off-duty pilots picketed in several U.S. cities Friday over stalled negotiations. They have been without a new contract for three years.

“Alaska Airlines failed to properly plan for increased travel demand and take the steps necessary to ensure it attracted and retained pilots,” the pilots union said in a Friday press release.

People on social media complained about hourslong hold times and lines to get their canceled flights rescheduled.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/04 Russia synonymous with Bucha massacre
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/04/russia-now-synonymous-with-bucha-massacre-zelenskiy-says-amid-global-outcry-at-civilian-killings
GIST	<p>Ukraine’s president Volodymyr Zelenskiy has said that Russia’s public image is now one of torture and execution after the retreat of Russian forces in the town of Bucha led to the discovery of the killing of hundreds of civilians.</p> <p>Calling Russian soldiers “murderers”, “butchers” and “rapists”, Zelenskiy said late on Sunday: “your culture and human appearance perished together with the Ukrainian men and women”. He warned that “even worse things” may be found in other occupied regions.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials said the bodies of 410 civilians have been found in Kyiv-area towns that were recently retaken from Russian forces. Satellite images taken late last week show a 14-metre (45ft) mass grave in Bucha near the Church of St Andrew and Pyervozvannoho All Saints. Maxar, the company that took the pictures, said the first signs of excavation for a mass grave there were seen on 10 March, several weeks into the invasion.</p> <p>Witnesses of alleged atrocities in Bucha told the Guardian that Russian soldiers had fired on men fleeing the town, and had killed civilians at will. Taras Schevchenko, 43, said Russian soldiers had refused to allow men to leave through a humanitarian corridor, instead shooting at them as they fled across an open field. Bodies, he said, were scattered on the pavements, with some of those killed having been “squashed by tanks ... like animal skin rugs”.</p> <p>Shevchenko’s mother, Yevdokia, 77, said she had witnessed an elderly man who had challenged a Russian soldier being shot dead as his wife stood next to him. “They shot him dead, and ordered the woman to leave,” she said. The accounts could not be independently verified.</p>

Photographs from the town showed a scene of devastation, with hunks of charred and destroyed tanks and armoured vehicles lined up along one street, along with dead bodies.

Zelenskiy on Sunday made a surprise video appearance at the Grammy Awards celebration in Las Vegas and appealed to viewers to support his country “in any way you can”.

“Fill the silence with your music. Fill it today, to tell our story. Support us in any way you can. Any, but not silence,” Zelenskiy said in English in a video introducing John Legend’s performance of Free and featured Ukrainian musicians and a reading by Ukrainian poet Lyuba Yakimchuck.

Russia denied responsibility for the killing of civilians. Its defence ministry described the photos and videos from towns such as Bucha as “another staged performance by the Kyiv regime”, echoing a similar claim made after the bombing of a children’s and maternity hospital in Mariupol.

Figures around the world have condemned the brutality of Russian president Vladimir Putin’s forces.

The UK prime minister, Boris Johnson, said the “despicable” killings added to evidence of Russian war crimes, while the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, expressed shock about the “terrible and horrifying” footage from Bucha. “Streets littered with bodies. Bodies buried in makeshift conditions. There is talk of women, children and the elderly among the victims,” Scholz said. His defence minister, Christine Lambrecht, said the European Union should consider a ban on gas imports from Russia.

US secretary of state Antony Blinken described the images from retaken towns as “a punch in the gut” while United Nations secretary general António Guterres called for an independent investigation.

The head of the European Council, Charles Michel, said he was shocked by “haunting images of atrocities committed by [the] Russian army”, adding that “further EU sanctions and support are on their way”.

The head of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, said she was “appalled by reports of unspeakable horrors in areas from which Russia is withdrawing”. An independent investigation was urgently needed, she said, and “perpetrators of war crimes will be held accountable”.

Zelenskiy said he expected a UN security council meeting on Tuesday to discuss the atrocities, and was scathing on Sunday night of a historic western policy of “appeasing” Russia by failing to make Ukraine a Nato member 14 years ago at a summit in Bucharest. He invited former German and French leaders Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy to visit Bucha “to see what the policy of concessions” to Russia has led to, and urged Ukraine’s allies to do more than increase sanctions.

Ukraine’s ambassador to Australia warned on Monday against inferring much from the withdrawal of Russian forces around Kyiv. “They are now regrouping. They are using it as an operational pause and I’m sure they will mount another assault and therefore we need support of the free world to help us fight,” said ambassador Vasyl Myroshnychenko.

“We see civilians’ dead bodies lying around the city, many of them have their hands tied up. We are now collecting the evidence from the witnesses,” Myroshnychenko said of the recent discoveries in town such as Bucha, Irpin and Hostomel. “Multiple rapes of women, children killed. This is a massacre.”

The west needed to provide heavy weapons, air defence systems, anti-ship missiles, armoured, vehicles, tanks and planes to help Ukraine, the ambassador said. “It’s only two and a half flight from Kyiv to Paris. We’re in the middle of Europe and this is happening now in the 21st century.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/03 Rape as Russia weapon of war in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/03/all-wars-are-like-this-used-as-a-weapon-of-war-in-ukraine

Women across Ukraine are grappling with the threat of rape as a weapon of war as growing evidence of sexual violence emerges from areas retaken from retreating Russian forces.

The world was horrified on Sunday by a picture taken by the photographer Mikhail Palinchak on a highway 20km outside the capital, Kyiv, in which the bodies of one man and three women were piled under a blanket. The women were naked and their bodies had been partially burned, the photographer said.

The harrowing image adds to a mounting body of evidence that summary executions, rape and torture have been used against civilians in areas under Russian control since the Kremlin launched the invasion of its neighbour on 24 February.

Particularly difficult for many to comprehend is the scale of the sexual violence. As Russian troops have withdrawn from towns and suburbs around the capital in order to refocus the war effort on Ukraine's east, women and girls have come forward to tell the police, media and human rights organisations of atrocities they have suffered at the hands of Russian soldiers. Gang-rapes, assaults taking place at gunpoint, and rapes committed in front of children are among the grim testimonies collected by investigators.

"We have had several calls to our emergency hotline from women and girls seeking assistance, but in most cases it's been impossible to help them physically. We haven't been able to reach them because of the fighting," said Kateryna Cherepakha, the president of La Strada Ukraine, a charity that supports survivors of trafficking, domestic violence and sexual assault.

"Rape is an underreported crime and stigmatised issue even in peaceful times. I am worried that what we learn about is just going to be the tip of the iceberg."

Rape and sexual assault are considered war crimes and a breach of international humanitarian law, and both Ukraine's prosecutor general and the international Criminal Court have said they will open investigations into reported sexual violence. But what currently seems like a far-off possibility of justice has done little to assuage Ukrainian women's fears of what may yet happen in a war that is far from over.

Antonina Medvedchuk, 31, said that when she woke up to the sound of bombing on the day the war broke out, the first things she grabbed before leaving Kyiv were condoms and scissors to use as a weapon to protect herself.

"Every break between curfew and bombing I was looking for emergency contraception instead of a basic first aid kit," she said. "My mother tried to reassure me: 'This is not a war like that, they don't exist anymore, they are from old movies.' I have been a feminist for eight years, and I cried in silence, because all wars are like this."

It is not only Russian soldiers Ukrainian women may have to protect themselves from. In Vinnytsia, a town in the west of the country, a teacher reported to police that a member of the territorial defence services dragged her into the school library and tried to rape her. The man was arrested.

Organisations such as La Strada Ukraine and a countrywide network called Feminist Workshop have been working online and with local government to distribute information about medical, legal and psychological support available for victims of sexual assault, and are trying to find safe shelters for women and girls fleeing both the war and domestic violence.

They fear, however, that the trauma caused by the use of rape as a military tactic will lead to deep suffering across Ukrainian society for years to come.

	<p>“When a woman gets away it looks like she’s safe, she’s far away from the guns and the man who raped her,” said Sasha Kantser, external affairs manager for the Lviv chapter of Feminist Workshop, which has helped hundreds of displaced women and girls since the war broke out.</p> <p>“But the trauma is a bomb inside her, that follows her. The scale of what is happening now is heartbreaking.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/04 Oregon decriminalization of drugs mixed
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/04/oregon-drugs-decriminalisation-ballot-measure-110
GIST	<p>Callers to the Measure 110 hotline, which was set up a year ago, after Oregon became the first state in the US to decriminalise personal possession of drugs including meth and heroin, may hear Martin Lewis Lockett’s deep, reassuring voice.</p> <p>Lockett, who is in recovery, first assesses the callers, who can use the hotline if they have received a police citation for drug use. He uses an evidence-based screening tool to determine if someone has substance use issues, and connects them with nearby help. In one case, a man called the hotline after relapsing, but told Lockett his drug use was just a hiccup. “I know minimisation when I hear it,” Lockett said. By the end of the call, the man realised he needed help, and Lockett linked him to services.</p> <p>But Lockett says the hotline isn’t as busy as he hoped. “We just don’t get a lot of traffic on that line,” Lockett said. Not enough people are calling for help, and even when they do Lockett said it’s tricky to find detox and residential treatment beds. Many can wait weeks.</p> <p>The hotline is one of the central elements of Oregon’s bold decision, one year ago, to decriminalise drugs. In November 2020 the state’s residents voted to pass Ballot Measure 110, which, inspired by Portugal’s decriminalisation 20 years before, recognised substance use disorder as a health issue and halted the incarceration of drug users. Anyone in Oregon now caught with small amounts of drugs – including meth, heroin, LSD and cocaine – receives a ticket for \$45 to \$100, and a card with the number of a hotline. If they call the hotline, they can complete a substance use disorder screening to get their ticket waived. The hotline, staffed by counsellors like Lockett who are themselves in recovery, also aims to connect people with help if they need it. Advocates and lawmakers are now pushing for similar bills and measures in six more states.</p> <p>One year in, there have been some successes. There is new funding for harm reduction, which the evidence suggests has saved lives, and police are no longer arresting people for carrying small quantities, meaning they will not face incarceration or blemishes on their records, which can prevent them from finding housing and employment.</p> <p>At the same time, however, substance use is rising in Oregon. It ranks second in the US for substance use disorder, according to a December 2021 analysis, and 50th out of 50 states – dead last – for the percentage of teens and adults needing but not receiving treatment for substance use disorder. Across the US, overdose deaths are increasing – and the same is true in Oregon, where medical examiner data showed drug toxicity deaths continued to inch up in 2021.</p> <p>Experts say decriminalisation is not the problem. What the new measure lacks, they say, is a proper pathway to recovery amid the growing overdose crisis.</p> <p>Before Measure 110, personal possession carried a misdemeanour charge, punishable by up to a year in jail and thousands in fines. Those who were eligible could choose between the traditional criminal system or drug courts, which give judges the power to order treatment, require drug testing and impose punishment or incentives.</p> <p>But Measure 110 allows people caught with small amounts of drugs to avoid the criminal justice system, meaning those people instead are routed to the hotline via the citations.</p>

These were meant to be a “golden ticket” to health assessments and services, explained Mike Marshall, executive director of Oregon Recovers.

Instead, of the 1,885 people who received tickets for personal possession in the first year, only 91 called the hotline, according to its non-profit operator, Lines For Life.

“Virtually no one is calling the hotline, so that referral process is a failure,” Marshall said.

He believes Oregon should have followed Portugal by creating an effective pathway to help before decriminalising drugs. “We did the complete opposite: we decriminalised and stopped intervening in people’s drug use through the criminal justice system, but then are still deciding on funding for that alternative pathway,” he said. “That’s not the way to go.”

In contrast to Oregon’s citation method, under Portugal’s system, people caught with small amounts of drugs are sent to local “dissuasion commissions” that assess whether they have substance use disorder, and can refer them to treatment, impose fines or require community service.

“At least through the criminal justice system, someone had a pathway to recovery, as flawed as that was, and as stigmatising as that was,” he continued. “There’s a whole bunch of people who are no longer given a pathway to recovery if they choose it.”

Even for those people who do call, finding detox and residential treatment beds is difficult because the services are historically underresourced – and the pandemic just made the situation worse, according to data provided by the Oregon Council for Behavioural Health. Measure 110 did nothing to change any of that.

People aren’t calling because there are no consequences for ignoring the ticket, explains Dwight Holton, CEO of Lines For Life. He urged states looking to copy Oregon to consider whether they already have effective pathways to connect people to help. “The most important thing that people who are looking at us can learn is that it’s imperative to build better connections to recovery – the sooner the better,” he said. “We’re playing catch-up.”

Some are defending the decision to decriminalise drugs without first firming up a pathway to recovery.

Immediate decriminalisation was necessary to decrease stigma and prevent thousands of arrests each year, especially in communities of colour, said Tera Hurst, executive director of Health Justice Recovery Alliance. While she conceded the citations were not the best intervention, she argued coercing people into treatment through drug courts undermines their dignity and autonomy, and noted that opioid users face high risk of overdose when they are first released from jail.

“I don’t think we have time to do this in a slow and steady way as some people suggest. In theory that’s fine, but in reality, we don’t invest in things until we have to. Decriminalisation created a space where we have to start investing in these services,” Hurst said.

Measure 110 did create a new funding stream, doling out \$30m in grants in its first year for harm reduction, housing and employment assistance, peer support and clinical assessments. That money helped more than 16,000 people. Max’s Mission, a non-profit in southern Oregon, received \$215,000 of that money which it used to buy naloxone, which reversed 111 overdoses.

Another \$270m will be distributed this spring to create a Behavioural Health Resource Network – entities in each county that assess drug users’ needs, create intervention plans and link them to care. (The grants have faced delays due to internal conflict between members of the Measure 110 Oversight and Accountability Council, which is responsible for handing out the money.)

	<p>Heather Jefferis, executive director of the Oregon Council for Behavioural Health, said the next stage of Measure 110 will fund a “robust continuum of care” for people with substance use disorder. “Oregon has never had that,” she said.</p> <p>She believes it’s too soon to cast doubt on Measure 110. After the grant funds are handed out, she looks forward to data on what new services became available, how many people are referred to services, and other numbers that will show if Measure 110 is having an impact.</p> <p>Back at the hotline, Lockett thinks Measure 110 will succeed after the Behavioural Health Resource Network is in place. Each county’s network is required to have a hotline, and some will partner with Lines for Life, making their hotline busier.</p> <p>“If the goal is to reduce the amount of people using drugs ... then it’s going to take a concerted effort by all of us, clinicians, police officers, county behavioural health systems – across the board it’s got to be a concerted effort,” he said. “Anything as large scale as this for Oregon, it’s gonna take time. But there’s certainly hope on the horizon.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	04/04 Day 40 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/04/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-40-including-the-bucha-killings
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukraine has accused Russian forces of committing war crimes and a “massacre” in Bucha, a town 18 miles north-west of the capital, Kyiv, after the bodies of unarmed Ukrainian civilians and mass graves were found on Sunday. Bodies of civilians – many with bound hands, close-range gunshot wounds and signs of torture – were found on the streets after Ukrainian troops reclaimed the town. • Ukrainian prosecutors said they had found 410 bodies in towns near Kyiv, and 140 bodies had been examined on Sunday. Russia denied allegations that its forces killed civilians as it retreated from war-torn areas of the country. • Satellite images from Bucha appear to show an approximately 45ft-long trench dug into the grounds of a church where a mass grave has been identified. • World leaders condemned the killings and called for independent investigations. The French president, Emmanuel Macron, the UN secretary general, António Guterres, the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, the British prime minister, Boris Johnson, and the US ambassador to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, all publicly condemned Russia’s actions. • The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, described the killings as “a punch to the gut” and joined western allies in vowing to document the atrocities to hold the perpetrators to account. • Russia described the situation in Bucha as a “provocation” by Ukraine intended to disrupt peace talks. The Kremlin’s foreign ministry said Russia was seeking a UN security council meeting on the matter. Its defence ministry described the photos and videos as “another staged performance by the Kyiv regime”. Dmitry Polyanskiy, Russia’s UN security council deputy representative, tweeted on Sunday: “In the light of heinous provocation of Ukrainian radicals in Bucha Russia requested a meeting of UN security council on Monday April 4.” • Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, condemned Russian forces as “murderers”, “torturers” and “rapists” after the killings came to light, describing the Kremlin-ordered attack on his country as amounting to genocide. “How did they also become butchers? ... They killed deliberately and with pleasure,” he said in a national address late on Sunday. He vowed to investigate and prosecute all Russian “crimes” in Ukraine. • Ukraine’s foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, said Bucha was a “deliberate massacre” while speaking on Times Radio on Sunday. Describing Russia as “worse than Isis”, he said Russian forces were guilty of murder, torture, rape and looting. He also urged G7 countries to impose “devastating” sanctions immediately. • Zelenskiy criticised the west’s “policy of concessions to Russia” in the lead-up to the war. Describing Ukraine’s past pursuit of Nato membership, he said: “They thought that by refusing Ukraine, they would be able to appease Russia, to convince it to respect Ukraine and live normally

	<p>next to us ... I invite Mrs Merkel and Mr Sarkozy to visit Bucha and see what the policy of concessions to Russia has led to in 14 years. To see with their own eyes the tortured Ukrainian men and women.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russian forces continued their attacks on other Ukrainian cities. Seven people died and 34 were wounded after a residential area in Kharkiv was struck on Sunday, local prosecutors said. • At least 70% of Chernihiv has been destroyed by Russian forces, the city’s mayor said on Sunday. Vladyslav Atroshenko said the “consequences” of the attacks were severe and mirrored those of other badly damaged cities in Ukraine such as Bucha and Mariupol. • Russian forces are continuing to “consolidate and reorganise” their offensive in Donbas, while the capture of Mariupol is a “key objective” of the Russian invasion, UK’s Ministry of Defence said. • The Ukrainian military claims Russia has launched a “hidden mobilisation” of about 60,000 soldiers to replenish units lost in Ukraine, according to its latest operational report. • Russian missiles struck “critical infrastructure”, most likely a fuel depot, near Ukraine’s southern port of Odesa in the early hours of Sunday but there were no casualties, officials in the city said. • The European Union should consider a ban on gas imports from Russia, Germany’s defence minister, Christine Lambrecht, has said. • The huge scale of sexual violence endured by women and girls in Ukraine has begun to emerge as victims recount the abuse they have suffered at the hands of Russian soldiers. • The United Nations’ human rights office says there have been 3,455 civilian casualties since the war in Ukraine began. The figure includes more than 1,400 deaths and over 2,000 injured people, but the actual number is believed to be considerably higher, the agency said in recently published report. • Zelenskiy appeared in a video message at the Grammy awards, calling for viewers to “fill the silence with your music” and “tell the truth about the war” across social networks and on TV.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 Russia war push auto prices, shortages?
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/russia-war-could-further-escalate-auto-prices-and-shortages/
GIST	<p>DETROIT (AP) — BMW has halted production at two German factories. Mercedes is slowing work at its assembly plants. Volkswagen, warning of production stoppages, is looking for alternative sources for parts.</p> <p>For more than a year, the global auto industry has struggled with a disastrous shortage of computer chips and other vital parts that has shrunk production, slowed deliveries and sent prices for new and used cars soaring beyond reach for millions of consumers.</p> <p>Now, a new factor — Russia’s war against Ukraine — has thrown up yet another obstacle. Critically important electrical wiring, made in Ukraine, is suddenly out of reach. With buyer demand high, materials scarce and the war causing new disruptions, vehicle prices are expected to head even higher well into next year.</p> <p>The war’s damage to the auto industry has emerged first in Europe. But U.S. production will likely suffer eventually, too, if Russian exports of metals — from palladium for catalytic converters to nickel for electric vehicle batteries — are cut off.</p> <p>“You only need to miss one part not to be able to make a car,” said Mark Wakefield, co-leader of consulting firm Alix Partners’ global automotive unit. “Any bump in the road becomes either a disruption of production or a vastly unplanned-for cost increase.”</p> <p>Supply problems have bedeviled automakers since the pandemic erupted two years ago, at times shuttering factories and causing vehicle shortages. The robust recovery that followed the recession caused demand</p>

for autos to vastly outstrip supply — a mismatch that sent prices for new and used vehicles skyrocketing well beyond overall high inflation.

In the United States, the average price of a new vehicle is up 13% in the past year, to \$45,596, according to Edmunds.com. Average used prices have surged far more: They're up 29% to \$29,646 as of February.

Before the war, S&P Global Mobility had predicted that global automakers would build 84 million vehicles this year and 91 million next year. (By comparison, they built 94 million in 2018.) Now it's forecasting fewer than 82 million in 2022 and 88 million next year.

Mark Fulthorpe, an executive director for S&P, is among analysts who think the availability of new vehicles in North America and Europe will remain severely tight — and prices high — well into 2023. Compounding the problem, buyers who are priced out of the new-vehicle market will intensify demand for used autos and keep those prices elevated, too — prohibitively so for many households.

Eventually, high inflation across the economy — for food, gasoline, rent and other necessities — will likely leave a vast number of ordinary buyers unable to afford a new or used vehicle. Demand would then wane. And so, eventually, would prices.

“Until inflationary pressures start to really erode consumer and business capabilities,” Fulthorpe said, “it’s probably going to mean that those who have the inclination to buy a new vehicle, they’ll be prepared to pay top dollar.”

One factor behind the dimming outlook for production is the shuttering of auto plants in Russia. Last week, French automaker Renault, one of the last automakers that have continued to build in Russia, said it would suspend production in Moscow.

The transformation of Ukraine into an embattled war zone has hurt, too. Wells Fargo estimates that 10% to 15% of crucial wiring harnesses that supply vehicle production in the vast European Union were made in Ukraine. In the past decade, automakers and parts companies invested in Ukrainian factories to limit costs and gain proximity to European plants.

The wiring shortage has slowed factories in Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic and elsewhere, leading S&P to slash its forecast for worldwide auto production by 2.6 million vehicles for both this year and next. The shortages could reduce exports of German vehicles to the United States and elsewhere.

Wiring harnesses are bundles of wires and connectors that are unique to each model; they can't be easily re-sourced to another parts maker. Despite the war, harness makers like Aptiv and Leoni have managed to reopen factories sporadically in Western Ukraine. Still Joseph Massaro, Aptiv's chief financial officer, acknowledged that Ukraine “is not open for any type of normal commercial activity.”

Aptiv, based in Dublin, is trying to shift production to Poland, Romania, Serbia and possibly Morocco. But the process will take up to six weeks, leaving some automakers short of parts during that time.

“Long term,” Massaro told analysts, “we’ll have to assess if and when it makes sense to go back to Ukraine.”

BMW is trying to coordinate with its Ukrainian suppliers and is casting a wider net for parts. So are Mercedes and Volkswagen.

Yet finding alternative supplies may be next to impossible. Most parts plants are operating close to capacity, so new work space would have to be built. Companies would need months to hire more people and add work shifts.

“The training process to bring up to speed a new workforce — it’s not an overnight thing,” Fulthorpe said.

Fulthorpe said he foresees a further tightening supply of materials from both Ukraine and Russia. Ukraine is the world's largest exporter of neon, a gas used in lasers that etch circuits onto computer chips. Most chip makers have a six-month supply; late in the year, they could run short. That would worsen the chip shortage, which before the war had been delaying production even more than automakers expected.

Likewise, Russia is a key supplier of such raw materials as platinum and palladium, used in pollution-reducing catalytic converters. Russia also produces 10% of the world's nickel, an essential ingredient in EV batteries.

Mineral supplies from Russia haven't been shut off yet. Recycling might help ease the shortage. Other countries may increase production. And some manufacturers have stockpiled the metals.

But Russia also is a big aluminum producer, and a source of pig iron, used to make steel. Nearly 70% of U.S. pig iron imports come from Russia and Ukraine, Alix Partners says, so steelmakers will need to switch to production from Brazil or use alternative materials. In the meantime, steel prices have rocketed up from \$900 a ton a few weeks ago to \$1,500 now.

So far, negotiations toward a cease-fire in Ukraine have gone nowhere, and the fighting has raged on. A new virus surge in China could cut into parts supplies, too. Industry analysts say they have no clear idea when parts, raw materials and auto production will flow normally.

Even if a deal is negotiated to suspend fighting, sanctions against Russian exports would remain intact until after a final agreement had been reached. Even then, supplies wouldn't start flowing normally. Fulthorpe said there would be "further hangovers because of disruption that will take place in the widespread supply chains."

Wakefield noted, too, that because of intense pent-up demand for vehicles across the world, even if automakers restore full production, the process of building enough vehicles will be a protracted one.

When might the world produce an ample enough supply of cars and trucks to meet demand and keep prices down?

Wakefield doesn't profess to know.

"We're in a raising-price environment, a (production)-constrained environment," he said. "That's a weird thing for the auto industry."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/03 S'Klallam Tribe returns to ancestral lands
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/the-port-gamble-lumber-mill-closed-decades-ago-now-the-tribe-that-was-forced-from-the-land-is-returning/
GIST	<p>PORT GAMBLE, Kitsap County — Darlene Anderson Peters would wear only her finest regalia to be in the presence of her ancestors: a chief's robe, more than three years in the making.</p> <p>Its long silky fringe swung through the salal and ferns as the Port Gamble S'Klallam elder explained the meaning of this simple cemetery in the woods.</p> <p>Killer whales carved atop a headstone cavorted in moss grown thick on the grave of Chief Joseph Anderson, born in 1895. By the time of his death in 1937 he would see the families of S'Klallam people removed from the place that was always their home on the clear salt waters of Port Gamble Bay — and adapting new ways in order to survive.</p> <p>After more than a century, the cemetery is back in S'Klallam hands, part of a larger circle of history, as descendants of the ancestors displaced by the Pope & Talbot lumber mill in 1853 work with successors of the timber company to heal their relationship, and this place.</p>

Returning the cemetery in 2016 to S’Klallam ownership was just the beginning: The tribe has since bought back more than 900 acres from Pope Resources, and last summer, sealed the deal on the purchase of development rights on part of the former mill site that displaced their ancestral village.

The latest deal is more than a conservation easement transaction. It’s part of a growing movement in which tribes are regaining control or ownership of their ancestral lands.

Small, personal acts also are helping to mend what it means today to be neighbors.

Jeromy Sullivan, chairman of the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe, remembers former Pope Resources CEO Tom Ringo, now retired, starting to spend time with the tribe, showing up to share meals. “He wanted to learn our culture,” Sullivan said.

He remembered the day Ringo joined the throng on the beach as Native people from all over the region gathered for a stop on the annual canoe journey at Port Gamble.

“Seeing that big tall redheaded dude walking through all the Indians, it was awesome,” Sullivan said.

A tribe returns

When the newcomers first came wanting their land, the S’Klallam people then numbering in the hundreds, told them to leave. But after smallpox and other diseases diminished their numbers to only dozens, the newcomers came back. This time, they stayed, and it was the S’Klallam people that were sent away, across the water to Point Julia.

The company took the prime waterfront where the S’Klallam people enjoyed their sheltered village site, tucked out of the wind, right where the good fishing was, and where they could watch for the approach of enemies from the north.

As the changes relentlessly came, the cemetery near Hansville, Kitsap County, is testimony to the determination of Chief Anderson and other S’Klallam people who refused to be pushed away from their traditional territory, said Anderson’s grandson, Loren Anderson, 69.

Like so many S’Klallam men, his grandfather would canoe across the bay to work in the Pope & Talbot lumber mill that displaced them.

While the newcomers wanted the S’Klallam peoples’ land, they also needed their labor.

The ancestors of today’s Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe were the first to go to work in the mill when it opened in 1853 and they were the last to leave when the company shut it down in 1995. Removed in 1997 after a fire burned down what was left of the structure, it was the longest continuously operating lumber mill in the U.S., shipping forest products all over the globe.

When the last whistle blew, all those years of operation left a prodigious mess to clean up in the water and on the land. And that wasn’t all.

After the tribe in 2010 shot down the company’s initial plans to redevelop the land in and around Port Gamble with an ambitious housing development, the company realized its relationship with its longest neighbors needed healing as well.

One of the first steps Pope Resources, the successor to Pope & Talbot, took was returning the cemetery — which could not by county law be logged anyway — to the tribe. “We said, let’s get together with some elders and go find it; we’ll give it back,” said David Nunes, former president and CEO of Pope Resources and now CEO of Rayonier, the international forestry and real estate investment trust that acquired Pope in 2020.

“In our hearts and spirits, we never thought it was gone,” Anderson Peters said of the cemetery. But it felt good and right to no longer be on what the law regarded as someone else’s property when they visited their ancestors, Loren Anderson said.

Then, last August, the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe and Rayonier announced the tribe bought the development rights for \$3.9 million on 18.4 acres on the former mill site. The conservation easement purchased by the tribe restricts development and will allow public access to portions of the waterfront site. Raydient, Rayonier’s development subsidiary, still owns the land.

Funding for the purchase came from a variety of conservation programs administered by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Actions are underway across Washington to rectify the history of stolen lands, broken treaties and the violence of colonization. Deals are taking every shape and size, from returning the 2-acre cemetery to a sweeping so-called Land Back transaction spearheaded by Conservation Northwest.

The nonprofit raised \$4.6 million from private donors and NGOs to return more than 9,200 acres to the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation last October.

The property is a crucial wildlife corridor in north central Washington, and its return is good not only for conservation, but helps redress a bit of historic injustice. The land is part of the north half of tribes’ original reservation, which was taken back by an act of Congress in 1892 after the discovery of gold in the area. The tribe lost a quarter of its territory, including possession of Kettle Falls, then one of the world’s great salmon fisheries later destroyed with the building of Grand Coulee Dam.

Healing the land and water

Today, the shore at Port Gamble where the mill used to be is a scarified landscape awaiting its next chapter.

On a recent visit, Sullivan, the tribe’s chairman, walked the ground where his ancestors once lived. “There is shell midden over here,” he said, referring to the mix of broken bone and shell left from cooking fires hundreds and thousands of years ago.

The village here had been in use for millennia. “We found a lot of 5,000-year-old artifacts, 2,000-year-old artifacts, whale bones,” Sullivan said.

Moving across the water to Point Julia was a hardship. The company built colonial style homes on the beach where the families were exposed to harsh winters. They could see the highest tides rise through their floor boards.

The mill’s whistle set the hours of the day. The wages and steady work there may actually have helped the tribe stay together, Sullivan said, drawn by the work, instead of scattering with the arrival of the newcomers.

Families persisted as a community, eventually gaining federal recognition, formalizing the government-to-government relationship promised to their treaty signers. The tribe in the 1940s slowly amassed land for housing and government buildings on the uplands above Point Julia.

Sullivan can point to the house there where he grew up — where his father rose daily to work for the mill for 33 years, leaving his job as a skilled sawyer only when the company shut the mill down.

With the site scraped bare, it’s hard to remember today the presence of a mill that filled ships with lumber milled from the lush old-growth forests that once cloaked the hillsides all the way to the water.

“All of this was full of lumber. All of it. There was times the whole bay was filled with logs,” Sullivan said.

Cleanup continues

An in-water cleanup at the former mill site targeting creosote, cadmium, mercury, petroleum hydrocarbons, dioxins, and more began in September 2015, and was completed in January 2017, according to the state Department of Ecology, the lead agency on the work.

Removed were 8,592 creosoted pilings; 110,537 cubic yards of wood waste and contaminated sediment; and 56,500 square feet of derelict overwater structures. Some 224,091 tons of clean cap material and 113,342 cubic yards of clean sand were placed on the sediments to aid recovery. About 3,485 linear feet of shoreline were improved. In all, 106 acres were cleaned up, at a cost to Pope Resources of more than \$20 million.

Next up for Pope is addressing the remaining contamination on the mill site and uplands.

A range of options is under consideration for the north side of the mill site beyond the conservation easement, said Adrian Miller, director of government affairs for Rayonier's land holdings in the Northwest.

Adrian Miller of Rayonier worked with the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe to help shape the future of the former Pope & Talbot mill site where many tribal members worked and where they had also lived for generations before the mill was built. (Alan Berner / The Seattle Times)

Adrian Miller of Rayonier worked with the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe to help shape the future of the former Pope & Talbot mill site where many tribal... (Alan Berner / The Seattle Times)More
Formerly with Pope, he laughs, remembering how tense times were with the tribe, especially after the tribe in 2010 killed the company's original plan for the extensive real estate development called the String of Pearls for some 7,000 acres of land in and around Port Gamble.

Job one after that, Miller said, to get back on track, was just trying to get past dynamics so toxic the mindset was, "No. Now what was the question?"

As Pope listened, the company learned. The tribe wanted land back. The company sold it to them: 937 acres adjacent to its reservation boundaries, adding crucial pieces to the tribe's land base. The deal was part of a historic 2019 agreement that includes allowing the tribe exclusive rights to harvest shellfish from company-owned tidelands.

The tribe also agreed to work with the company, Kitsap County, other tribes and the North Kitsap community for redevelopment and restoration of Port Gamble.

Sullivan has a wary optimism as the tribe and the timber company go forward, with much yet undecided for this landscape. But at least they are talking.

It took five years of professional mediation to get there, and a lot of time and commitment to stick with it even after some long walkaways when things got stuck — at one point, for nine months.

Anderson Peters also credits the ancestors, the Strong People, who kept the families together in those first 100 years, to become the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe of today, with some 1,200 members.

"We should never forget them, they carried the spirit and the culture, the ones that have passed, we should never forget them. They kept us alive," Anderson Peters said.

"The young ones today, they are floating around on the cream. Sometimes people were hungry. People forget that."

The one thing the tribe was never going to do, she said, was disappear.

	“It is hard to keep down a strong spirit,” she said of her ancestors. “I can feel them singing inside me.”
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/02 Protests outside officials’ homes continue
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/01/world/mandates-are-ending-in-the-us-but-protests-outside-officials-homes-continue.html
GIST	<p>Many pandemic restrictions in the United States and Canada have been relaxed, but that has not stopped protesters from gathering outside some government officials’ homes and badgering them.</p> <p>Although vaccination and masking rules have generally eased in the past few months, protests have continued outside officials’ residences in Massachusetts and other places in the United States, and in Nova Scotia and Alberta in Canada. Demonstrators have disrupted traffic, disturbed neighbors and, in some cases, targeted officials with racist and sexist language.</p> <p>Since she took office in November, Boston Mayor Michelle Wu has been targeted by demonstrators. Many of them oppose her vaccination mandates requiring city workers and some people in indoor settings to be vaccinated, although one has been held up by a court ruling. They have been pestering her for weeks outside her home, calling her “Hitler” and shouting at her children that she was going to prison, she said on Twitter in January.</p> <p>Wu lifted the city’s universal indoor mask requirement earlier this month, but the protests have not stopped.</p> <p>Protesters have also harangued a Boston city council member, Ricardo Arroyo, outside his home, he said on Twitter last week.</p> <p>In Nova Scotia last month, some people who opposed the Canadian province’s pandemic restrictions demonstrated outside the home of Dr. Robert Strang, the province’s chief medical officer of health. Nova Scotia has been lifting restrictions in phases since last month.</p> <p>In January, demonstrators opposing pandemic requirements in Calgary, Alberta, gathered outside the home of the mayor, Jyoti Gondek.</p> <p>Many of the targets of protesters are women or people of color, or both.</p> <p>“Unfortunately, many women of color serving in positions of leadership are used to this,” Wu told reporters in January.</p> <p>Monica Wang, a professor at the Boston University School of Public Health and an associate director at the university’s Center for Antiracist Research, said while the public had a right to question pandemic policies, an official’s gender or ethnicity “shouldn’t be part of the conversation.”</p> <p>“It calls into question: What is the actual argument being made?” Wang said.</p> <p>Catherine Vitale, 31, has been protesting outside Wu’s home for a few days a week since January. She said she started going because she opposed Wu’s vaccine mandate for city workers, and she later went to protest school masking and other requirements.</p> <p>“It has absolutely nothing to do with her race or gender,” said Vitale, who lives in Boston and said she had lost jobs during the pandemic. “It’s completely about her policy.”</p> <p>Some officials have tried to limit the protests with ordinances or amendments to existing laws that restrict when and where people can gather.</p>

	<p>Last month, Wu proposed a city rule to block “residential picketing” from 9 p.m. to 9 a.m. The Boston City Council approved her proposal at a meeting Wednesday, clearing the way for Wu to sign it into law. On Friday, the police said that five protesters near her home were fined for violating the rule, The Boston Globe reported. Vitale told the newspaper in a statement that the demonstrators had not known that the ordinance was in effect.</p> <p>After protesters arrived outside Strang’s home in Nova Scotia, provincial authorities amended a law last week to block protesters from coming within 50 meters (164 feet) of a health official’s home. In January, a Florida state senator proposed a bill to limit protests outside people’s homes.</p> <p>Marty Walsh, a former mayor of Boston, did not face these kinds of protests before he left to become the U.S. labor secretary, but public health authorities across the United States have been harassed for their pandemic policies, according to a study published in March in the American Journal of Public Health.</p> <p>More than half of the 583 local health departments surveyed by researchers at Johns Hopkins University reported that some members of their staff had been harassed in the first 11 months of the pandemic.</p> <p>In April 2020, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government’s top infectious disease doctor, began receiving enhanced security from the federal government after he encouraged social distancing and began receiving threats. He has continued to face harsh criticism, and some Republican politicians have echoed attacks on him from right-wing commentators.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/01 Court: racial covenants stay public record
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/politics/washington-racial-covenants-ruling-law/293-8284106f-8c2b-4e5d-9eaa-8aad5817f909
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. — The Washington State Supreme court ruled Thursday that county auditors cannot remove racial covenants from a home's title and deed from the public record.</p> <p>The ruling comes from a case in Spokane County in which property owner Alex May sought to have racial covenants, language in home titles that made it illegal for people of color to live there, removed from the title to his property and from public records.</p> <p>According to a unanimous opinion from the Washington state Supreme Court, May and his wife bought the property in 2017 “subject to covenants, conditions, restrictions and easements, if any, affecting title, which may appear in public record.” May then filed a complaint for declaratory relief against Spokane County in 2018 seeking to have the racial covenant voided from the title of the property and public records.</p> <p>The covenant, which dates back to declarations filed in 1953, reads, "No race or nationality other than the white race shall use or occupy any building on any lot."</p> <p>Both the Spokane County trial court and the Court of Appeals found that the statute does not allow the covenant to be removed, but does allow for an order voiding the covenant to be filed with the title.</p> <p>“We must ensure that future generations have access to these documents because, although the covenants are morally repugnant, they are part of a documented history of disenfranchisement of a people,” Justice G. Helen Whitener wrote in the Supreme Court's unanimous opinion. “It is our history.”</p> <p>Before May's case reached the state Supreme Court, the Washington state Legislature amended a law surrounding racial covenants. Under the new law, property owners are allowed to seek "judicial remedy" to remove the covenants from the title.</p> <p>The amended law also states that removing the language should not prevent preservation of the law for "historical or archival purposes."</p>

	<p>Whitener wrote that the Legislature's amendments allow a physical record of racial covenants to be maintained while also allowing property owners to remove the covenants from their chains of title.</p> <p>She added that removing all evidence of the racial covenants would not follow the state Legislature's intent to eradicate discrimination, but would instead destroy physical evidence that discrimination existed.</p> <p>"It would be all too easy for future generations to look back at these property records with no physical evidence of the discriminatory covenants and conclude that the covenants never existed at all," she wrote in the collective opinion.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	04/03 Thousands stranded Alaska cancels flights
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/passengers-stranded-more-alaska-airlines-flights-canceled-again/OJS6XCYKGFDLDCZWADUARX2UCM/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Thousands of Alaska Airlines passengers found themselves stranded, including many at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport as flights were canceled for a third straight day.</p> <p>The airline said this is due to a pilot shortage and ongoing negotiations with the pilots union.</p> <p>The airline canceled 73 flights Sunday, including 33 at Sea-Tac Airport.</p> <p>The airline provided KIRO 7 with numbers and the cancellations have impacted more than 37,000 travelers since flights were first canceled Friday.</p> <p>KIRO 7's Kevin Ko talked with several passengers whose flights were canceled Sunday.</p> <p>"Basically, just been redirected from line to line, trying to get us a new flight. I've waited in this line once already, so here I am again," traveler Patrick Monreal said.</p> <p>"I had to ask my friend to watch my dog for another day. I had to tell my teachers that I'm not able to be there tomorrow. I had to cancel babysitting. I was supposed to be doing (it) tomorrow. So, this was really big, inconvenient waste of time," Kendra Parker said.</p> <p>While the airline said there is a pilot shortage, the pilots union said it is on the airline.</p> <p>"I think it's on the airline and not the pilots. But that's not my expertise," Monreal said.</p> <p>"We're ready and we want to fly. We just simply don't have enough pilots at this time to execute the schedule the company has put forth," said Will McQuillen, the Alaska Airlines MEC chairman for the Air Line Pilots Association.</p> <p>McQuillen represents the pilot for the union and said pilots are quitting in droves because the working conditions don't meet the industry standard of other airlines.</p> <p>"The attrition that we've seen is not just amongst new pilots. We are losing pilots who have been here for a number of years. We lost captains to other airlines and that is so unique," McQuillen said.</p> <p>The negotiations have been ongoing and Alaska Airlines said it has offered a fair deal but pilots disagree.</p> <p>The high number of resignations mixed with increased demand for flights is leading to the travel troubles and the pilots association said it saw it coming.</p>

	<p>“What you’re seeing is something that we warned the company about late last fall and ongoing warnings issued throughout the spring about the fact that attritions was becoming a material concern. That they would have enough pilots to operate the schedule,” McQuillen said.</p> <p>McQuillen said he fears cancellations will be inevitable in the days to come, especially with the spring break season ramping up.</p> <p>“That will stop, that will stop once we have a comprehensive agreement. Can’t emphasize that enough,” said McQuillen.</p> <p>As of Monday, 21 Alaska Airlines flights have already been canceled.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	04/03 Covid, diabetes in public health collision
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/03/health/diabetes-covid-deaths.html
GIST	<p>After an insect bite on his back became infected, David Donner, a retired truck driver in rural Alabama, waited six hours in a packed emergency room with his wife, before coronavirus vaccines were widely available. A few days later, they both began experiencing the telltale symptoms of Covid-19.</p> <p>Debra Donner quickly recovered, but Mr. Donner, 66, landed in the I.C.U. “The virus barely slowed her down, but I ended up surrounded by nurses in hazmat suits,” he said. His halting recovery has left him dependent on a wheelchair. “I walk 20 feet and I’m huffing and puffing like I ran 20 miles.”</p> <p>The Donners see little mystery in why they fared so differently: Mr. Donner has diabetes, a chronic disease that hobbles the body’s ability to regulate blood sugar and inexorably wreaks havoc on circulation, kidney function and other vital organs.</p> <p>After older people and nursing home residents, perhaps no group has been harder hit by the pandemic than people with diabetes. Recent studies suggest that 30 to 40 percent of all coronavirus deaths in the United States have occurred among people with diabetes, a sobering figure that has been subsumed by other grim data from a public health disaster that is on track to claim a million American lives sometime this month.</p> <p>People with diabetes are especially vulnerable to severe illness from Covid, partly because diabetes impairs the immune system but also because those with the disease often struggle with high blood pressure, obesity and other underlying medical conditions that can seriously worsen a coronavirus infection.</p> <p>“It’s hard to overstate just how devastating the pandemic has been for Americans with diabetes,” said Dr. Giuseppina Imperatore, who oversees diabetes prevention and treatment at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>Diabetes patients hospitalized with Covid spend more time in the I.C.U., are more likely to be intubated and are less likely to survive, according to several studies, one of which found that 20 percent of hospitalized coronavirus patients with diabetes died within a month of admission. Though researchers are still trying to understand the dynamics between the two diseases, most agree on one thing: Uncontrolled diabetes impairs the immune system and decreases a patient’s ability to withstand a coronavirus infection.</p> <p>Diabetes is a pernicious disease that is at once ubiquitous and invisible, partly because most people with the condition do not appear outwardly ill. It affects 34 million Americans, or 13 percent of all adults, but draws less funding and public attention than other major killers like cancer, Alzheimer’s and heart disease.</p> <p>Even as the pandemic’s hold on political leaders and the public begins to fade, researchers, clinicians and other experts in the field are hoping the disproportionate suffering and death among people with diabetes will bring renewed attention to the disease, which annually claims 100,000 lives and soaks up one in four health care dollars spent.</p>

“Millions of Americans were already struggling with diabetes, and then Covid came along and cut a huge swath of suffering and misery that has been largely overlooked by the public and policymakers,” said Dr. David Kerr, the director of research and innovation at Sansum Diabetes Research Institute in California. “Diabetes is a wicked problem and Covid has just shone a bright light on this crisis.”

Like the pandemic, which has had an outsize toll on communities of color, the burden of diabetes falls more heavily on Latino and Black Americans, highlighting systemic failures in health care delivery that have also made the coronavirus far deadlier for the poor, said Nadia Islam, a medical sociologist at NYU Langone Health. “It’s not that diabetes itself makes Covid inherently worse but rather uncontrolled diabetes, which is really a proxy for other markers of disadvantage,” she said. Compounding the concerns, some studies suggest that a coronavirus infection can heighten the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, a disease that is largely preventable through a healthy diet and exercise. Type 1, by contrast, is a genetic disorder that tends to emerge early in life and is sometimes referred to as juvenile diabetes. More than 90 percent of all diabetes cases in the United States are type 2.

One study published last month found that patients who recovered from Covid were 40 percent more likely to be diagnosed with type 2 diabetes within 12 months compared with the uninfected, though researchers have yet to determine a connection between the two conditions.

Over the past two years, doctors have also reported a sharp rise in young people being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, an increase that many believe is tied to the drastic spike in childhood obesity during the pandemic. “We’ve seen kids coming in so sick and dehydrated that they sometimes require I.C.U. care,” said Dr. Daniel Hsia, a diabetes specialist at the Pennington Medical Research Center at Louisiana State University.

About 1.5 million Americans are diagnosed with diabetes each year, according to the C.D.C., and roughly 96 million, about one in three adults, are at high risk for developing the disease.

Although the number of new diagnoses has begun to decline, the overall number of Americans with diabetes has doubled in the past two decades, an increase that mirrors the alarming rise of obesity, which affects more than 42 percent of adults.

Diabetes is an insidious disease that significantly increases the risks of premature blindness, stroke, and circulatory and neurological problems that can lead to infections requiring amputation of gangrenous toes and feet. As with many chronic conditions, the poor and people of color are diagnosed with diabetes at disproportionately higher rates. Black and Latino Americans are more than twice as likely to receive a diabetes diagnosis as whites, and inadequate access to medical care can make it harder for them to juggle the complex dietary, monitoring and treatment regimens that can stave off its devastating complications. Although there is much researchers don’t understand, many believe that uncontrolled diabetes greatly amplifies the perils of a Covid diagnosis. That’s because a sedentary lifestyle, putting on extra weight or failing to keep close tabs on blood sugar levels fuel chronic inflammation inside the body, which can increase insulin resistance and weaken the immune system.

Inflammation triggers the release of cytokines, tiny proteins that regulate the body’s immune response to infection or injury. Cytokines are a critical component of the normal healing process, but for people with diabetes and underlying chronic inflammation, all those cytokines can damage healthy tissue. Covid, it turns out, can provoke an uncontrolled release of cytokines, and the resulting “cytokine storm” can wreak havoc on vital organs like the lungs, leading to dire outcomes and death.

People with type 2 diabetes tend to fare more poorly than those with type 1, in part because those with type 1 tend to be younger.

In some respects, the pandemic has already had some positive effects on diabetes care by elevating the adoption of technology that enables remote management of the disease. The ramped up embrace of

telemedicine, for example, has made it possible for health care providers to spot a worrisome foot wound on a homebound patient.

Early in the pandemic, the Food and Drug Administration gave hospitals and long-term care facilities permission to distribute continuous glucose monitoring devices to coronavirus patients as a way of reducing the risks to health care workers. Clinicians have also learned the nuances of caring for hospitalized diabetics with Covid through more intensive monitoring and management of blood sugar levels.

But many advancements have been unevenly distributed. The uninsured cannot afford the latest glucose monitoring or insulin delivery devices, and in economically disadvantaged communities with low digital literacy, experts say that doctors are less likely to offer new technologies and treatments to Black and Hispanic patients, even when they are covered by insurance.

“The advances of recent years have been stunning but not everyone has access to them and that’s just tragic,” said Dr. Ruth S. Weinstock, a board member of the American Diabetes Association.

The soaring cost of insulin, an essential medicine for diabetes management, has also had a greater impact on the poor. A 2019 study found that one in four people with diabetes had rationed their insulin use, which can have dire health consequences. On Thursday, the House voted to cap the price of insulin at \$35 a month. President Biden supports the measure, which the Senate has yet to consider.

Betty Angeles, 59, sees up close the challenges of managing diabetes for the farmhands, busboys and other low-wage laborers in and around Santa Barbara, Calif. Ms. Angeles, a native of Peru, herself juggles three jobs: as a house cleaner, a pastry chef and a community health worker at Sansum Diabetes Research Institute, where she helps Spanish-speaking clients navigate the complexities of diabetes treatment.

“When you are uninsured and working two or three jobs it’s difficult to regularly see a doctor like you should,” said Ms. Angeles, who has managed her own diabetes for nearly three decades.

Sansum runs programs to make it easier for patients to stay healthy. That means regularly testing their blood sugar levels; encouraging clients to exercise, even if that means jogging in place for 15 minutes between jobs; and teaching them to prepare meals that favor fresh produce over bread, rice and tortillas — starchy carbohydrates that can complicate the body’s ability to regulate glucose.

Arianna Larez, who oversees the institute’s type 2 diabetes program, says Ms. Angeles and other outreach workers with community roots are the key to its success. She strongly believes the especialistas, as they are known in Spanish, deserve some credit for one encouraging data point: though many have been infected by the coronavirus, so far none of Sansum’s 400 clients have died of Covid.

“Building trusted relationships and creating easy-to-understand, culturally relevant information has real-world implications,” Ms. Larez said.

Experts say addressing the nation’s diabetes crisis will require more than expanding the number of community health workers: Well-funded public education campaigns are needed to drive home the importance of exercise and healthy eating, as are seismic changes to a food system geared to cheap, processed food — a heavy lift given the political might of the food and beverage industry.

But researchers say state and local governments can make a difference through programs that subsidize fresh produce for low-wage earners and zoning measures to lure supermarkets to so-called food deserts.

“Instead of telling poor people they’re lazy for not being physically active, why not make their neighborhoods safer so they aren’t afraid to go outside and exercise?” asked Dr. Sudip Bajpeyi, a researcher at the University of Texas at El Paso whose study on hospitalized Covid patients last June was among the first to highlight the outsize death toll among people with diabetes. “The only way to move the needle is to reform a system that prioritizes cures and new drugs over prevention.”

HEADLINE	04/03 Nursing home deaths at pandemic lows
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/03/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine?type=styleIn-live-updates&label=coronavirus%20updates&index=0#us-nursing-home-deaths-appear-to-be-at-pandemic-lows
GIST	<p>Deaths at American nursing home residents from Covid appear to be at their lowest levels since the coronavirus first swept the United States more than two years ago, according to the most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>Some 67 residents died during the week ending March 27. While that number could be adjusted in the coming weeks, it mirrors the lows last reached during June 2021 before facilities were hit with the Delta and Omicron variants. Although cases among residents climbed much more sharply in the fall and winter, deaths still reached roughly 1,500 in January before steadily dropping.</p> <p>But experts say there is little reason for complacency. Nursing home residents remain highly vulnerable to the virus because of their age and underlying medical conditions. While booster shots proved to be protective against severe illness during the latest surge, federal regulators already authorized second booster shots of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna coronavirus vaccines last week. There is also growing concern over a highly contagious subvariant of Omicron, known as BA.2.</p> <p>Getting the second booster shot to nursing home residents “is a real policy priority,” said David Grabowski, a health policy researcher at Harvard Medical School, who studies nursing homes. “We know this is protective.”</p> <p>But while there was a significant push by the federal government and the large pharmacy chains to vaccinate nursing home residents when the initial shots first became available, many facilities were slow to roll out booster shots last fall even as there began to be outbreaks. While some 88 percent of residents are fully vaccinated, about 76 percent have received a booster shot, according to the latest federal data.</p> <p>Immunizing staff members has been harder, with the federal mandate to require health care workers to be vaccinated facing legal challenges. While 86 percent of staff are fully vaccinated, only 43 percent have received a booster shot. In 13 states, fewer than a third of employees have received the added immunizations.</p> <p>“We have a lot of nursing homes around the country that lag behind,” said Dr. Grabowski, adding that he was concerned about residents in facilities that serve predominantly people on Medicaid and people of color. “I think there are going to be real issues of equity here,” he said.</p> <p>The gap between those who received the initial vaccinations and those who receive additional doses could continue to widen, said Brendan Williams, the chief executive of the New Hampshire Health Care Association, a state nursing home trade group. People appear more skeptical over the need for additional shots. “I worry there has been a lot of mixed messages from the federal government,” he said.</p> <p>While many nursing homes say they will provide the additional doses to their staff and residents, there does not seem to be significant urgency, said Dr. Grabowski. In Connecticut, for example, which earlier this year had issued an executive order mandating booster shots for workers in nursing homes, state health officials were reported to have indicated a similar directive for second boosters was not imminent.</p> <p>Mr. Williams remains cautious. “Right now, there doesn’t appear to be a crisis,” he said. “There’s not that attention being paid, but things can always change. It’s concerning.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 Zelenskyy from Ukraine at Grammys
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/volodymyr-zelenskyy-grammy-awards-john-legend-ukraine-performance/

GIST	<p>During music's biggest night, John Legend and the Recording Academy took time to honor victims of the current war in Ukraine. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy spoke to crowd in a pre-recorded message from Ukraine, where he told the crowd the importance of music and ongoing support for Ukraine.</p> <p>"The war doesn't let us choose who survives and who stays in eternal silence," Zelenskyy said in the pre-taped message "Our musicians wear body armor instead of tuxedos. They sing to the wounded in hospitals. Even to those who can't hear them. But the music will break through anyway."</p> <p>During the message, 12-time Grammy award winner John Legend performed "Free," accompanied by Siuzanna Iglidan, Mika Newton and Lyuba Yakimchuck, three Ukrainian artists.</p> <p>Next to Legend, Iglidan played the bandura, a Ukrainian folk instrument considered the national musical instrument, CBS Denver reports.</p> <p>"We defend our freedom," Zelenskyy added. "To live. To love. To sound. On our land, we are fighting Russia which brings horrible silence with its bombs. Fill the silence with your music. Fill it today. Tell our story. Tell the truth about the war on your social networks and TV. But not silence."</p> <p>Zelenskyy appeared on "Face the Nation" earlier Sunday, telling host Margaret Brennan that Russia's invasion, now in its sixth week, is about "the destruction and extermination" of the more than 100 nationalities in his country.</p> <p>"Indeed, this is genocide — the elimination of the whole nation and the people," Zelenskyy said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 Another pain: car insurance rates rising
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/auto-insurance-cost-2022-bankrate-premium/
GIST	<p>Soaring gas prices aren't the only expense U.S. drivers are grappling with these days. Insuring a vehicle costs roughly \$700 more now than before the coronavirus pandemic, industry data shows.</p> <p>The typical motorist will spend \$1,771 on auto insurance this year, up nearly \$100 from 2021, according to a new Bankrate study. But that is up sharply from 2019, when annual premiums totaled \$1,070, according to the National Association of Insurance Commissioners. That is raising the costs of car ownership at the same time that buying, servicing and fueling a vehicle also gets pricier.</p> <p>"Households' transportation budgets are already under significant financial strain amid the highest inflation in 40 years, and almost every facet of driving is getting more expensive," Bankrate analyst Sarah Foster said in a statement.</p> <p>Gas prices, which hit a record high of \$4.33 a gallon on March 11, now average about \$4.22. Meanwhile, the average price of a new car is up 12% from a year ago, the U.S. Labor Department reports. A typical new car now costs \$46,404, according to Kelley Blue Book. The price of used cars has increased a stunning 41% in the past year and now averages roughly \$29,000, Edmunds data shows.</p> <p>The Bankrate study examined the nation's 25 largest cities to determine where drivers pay the most in car insurance as a portion of their annual income. It found that motorists in Boston and Seattle pay the least, at around 1.3% and 1.5% respectively. Drivers in Miami and Tampa, Florida, face the steepest car insurance costs at 5.5% and 5% of their earnings, respectively, according to Bankrate.</p> <p>"Drivers have many different routes to lower their car insurance costs, and the urgency is even higher for those who live in Miami, Tampa or Detroit, where drivers spend almost two times more of their income on insurance than the national average," Foster told CBS MoneyWatch. "'At the end of the day, insurance has no one-size-fits-all. Every company will offer something different, meaning comparison shopping is the single most important step to make sure you're not leaving money on the table.'"</p>

	<p>In general, a driver's car insurance rate is based on the vehicle, the person's driving record, where they live and other factors. Bankrate also found that adding a teenager to the policy, getting a speeding ticket and having a low credit score often raises car insurance costs.</p> <p>There were fewer drivers on the road in 2020 as COVID-19 led millions of Americans to work from home and shuttered businesses. As driving declined, consumer advocacy groups pushed insurers to refund customers. Allstate, Farmers and others eventually returned at least \$1 billion to customers.</p> <p>Insurance costs are now rising again as Americans hit the road and accident rates climb, according to the Insurance Information Institute in New York. Higher premiums reflect the increased cost of car parts as the pandemic continues to snarl global supply chains, the group noted last month.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	04/03 BA.2 variant is most unpredictable one yet
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-ba2-covid-variant-sweeping-asia-and-europe-is-the-most-unpredictable-one-yet?ref=home
GIST	<p>After spreading across Asia and Europe, the BA.2 subvariant of the novel coronavirus is now dominant in the United States, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>Right now, U.S. COVID cases are at a six-month low. But what happens next in the U.S. and nearby countries is hard to predict. Looking to Europe for hints isn't enormously helpful because, on that continent, BA.2 has behaved ... unpredictably. Indeed, unpredictability might be exactly what Americans—and everyone else—should expect as the pandemic enters its 28th month.</p> <p>A patchwork of public-health rules, varying vaccination rates and differing amounts of natural immunity from past infections mean that no two countries are the same. But even those differences don't fully explain BA.2's uneven impact.</p> <p>"The bottom line is that it is not predictable what BA.2 will do," John Swartzberg, a professor emeritus of infectious diseases and vaccinology at the University of California-Berkeley's School of Public Health, told The Daily Beast.</p> <p>Amid this confusion, at least one thing remains true, however. As volatile as BA.2 is when it comes to countries and populations, you can still protect yourself by getting vaccinated.</p> <p>Usually, there's a pattern with new COVID lineages. An uptick in positive tests from clinics, hospitals and wastewater samples correlates with a proportional increase in symptomatic infections.</p> <p>But when it comes to BA.2, "something different seems to be occurring," Peter Hotez, an expert in vaccine development at Baylor College, told The Daily Beast. "BA.2 is going up everywhere in terms of percentage of virus isolated" in tests, Hotez explained, "yet this translates into many different scenarios in terms of rise in cases."</p> <p>BA.2 is a highly mutated cousin of the previously-dominant BA.1 subvariant of Omicron, the latest major variant—"lineage" is the scientific term—of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Changes to the spike protein, which helps the virus to grab onto and infect our cells, make BA.1 and BA.2 extremely transmissible.</p> <p>BA.1, which first appeared last fall and quickly drove record infections across much of the world, was the most contagious respiratory virus many virologists had ever seen—until BA.2 showed up a few weeks after its older cousin. BA.2 could be as much as 80 percent more transmissible than BA.1, Swartzberg said.</p> <p>That's why BA.2 eventually has outcompeted BA.1 and become the dominant sublineage in a steadily growing number of countries. It happened first in China, which for more than two years managed to avoid</p>

major COVID outbreaks through a combination of travel restrictions, business closures, careful contact-tracing and strict quarantine rules.

BA.2 blew right through China's so-called "zero-COVID" strategy, causing cases to spike in Hong Kong then neighboring Shenzhen then Shanghai. Authorities locked down each city in turn but still failed to stop the sublineage's march across the country.

Europe was next. Health officials in the Americas watched nervously as BA.2 became dominant in one European country after another. After all, Europe tends to catch a particular coronavirus lineage or sublineage a month or six weeks before the U.S. and its neighbors do.

But BA.2 hasn't sent clear signals. The first confusing datapoint actually wasn't in Europe—it was in Africa. Weirdly, BA.2 was a virtual no-show in South Africa. That country logged a big surge in BA.1 cases in December, and then ... nothing. A steady decline in cases even as BA.2 was ravaging other big, rich countries.

Some European countries likewise have escaped significant harm from BA.2. Others are reeling.

The United Kingdom and France caught BA.1 big-time in December and January. Both countries reported record numbers of cases that, owing to the vaccines, fortunately didn't lead to record hospitalizations and deaths. Austria, by contrast, muddled through BA.1 before taking a huge hit from BA.2.

The U.K. reported a weekly average of 183,000 new daily cases in early January. Three weeks later, France counted a staggering weekly average of 354,000 daily new cases. The U.K.'s worst day for BA.1 deaths was Feb. 2, when authorities reported 535 COVID fatalities. On France's worst day of BA.1, Feb. 8, 691 people died of COVID.

Comparing the two countries is natural. Not only are they neighbors, they also have roughly the same number of people—around 67 million. Both have managed to fully vaccinate around three-quarters of their populations. Both have wound down all major domestic COVID restrictions.

It makes sense that BA.2 would affect France and the U.K. similarly. And there, at least, the sublineage made some sense. The BA.2 wave that rolled across the U.K. and France starting in February has been relatively minor compared to the BA.1 wave—in both countries.

France's daily new BA.2 cases seem to be leveling off at a weekly average of 126,000 infections. The U.K.'s weekly average of daily new cases peaked at 125,000 on March 21. Deaths tend to lag cases by a few weeks, so it's not clear how fatal BA.2 will be in either country, but so far the worst daily death toll is much lower than it was for BA.1.

Now consider Austria. With just 8.9 million people, it's smaller than the U.K. and France. But it's equally well-vaccinated—and even came close to having a nationwide vaccine-mandate before canceling the planned mandate back in early March, days before it was due to take effect. Austria, like most countries in Europe, has ended domestic restrictions on businesses and travel.

But unlike the U.K. and France, Austria caught BA.2 worse than BA.1. Daily new case rates from BA.1 swelled to a weekly average of 34,000 and stayed there for a month and a half. Then BA.2 arrived in early March and, without much respite from BA.1, added another 10,000 daily new cases on top of the existing weekly average.

Aside from a tiny dip in mid-March, the daily death rate has been going up and up on a weekly basis since January in Austria. BA.2 is claiming 40 lives a day, day after day on average.

It's difficult to determine which policies make the difference—assuming differences in public-health strategy matter at all against a virus as contagious as BA.2. Yes, Austria almost had a vaccine mandate,

but it didn't actually take force. And it's very hard to say what the proposed mandate's impact was, or would have been.

"Even if no additional people got vaccinated after a mandate was introduced, this doesn't mean it didn't 'work,' as the purpose of the mandate may have been to simply ensure that the only people you encounter when out at a restaurant or concert are vaccinated," Maxwell Smith, a bioethicist at Western University in Ontario, told The Daily Beast.

"In that case, the vaccination mandate 'working' would mean reducing levels of transmission of the virus in the settings to which it applied," Smith added. "Or, in the case of preserving critical infrastructure, it would mean something like fewer cases of severe illness or hospitalizations among those to whom the mandate applied."

There are lots of ways Austria's vaccine-mandate might have improved outcomes for millions of Austrians at risk of catching COVID. But that didn't stop Austria as a whole from suffering worse from BA.2 than other nearby countries.

"There are many factors that may have led to the case numbers we're seeing both in Austria and its neighboring countries, so I can't say with any certainty that this can be chalked up to their vaccine policies or vaccine politics alone," Smith said.

Experts are at a loss to explain what other factors might be at work. If nearby countries have vaccinated roughly the same percentage of their populations and have also reopened their borders, businesses and schools—thus allowing for a certain level of natural immunity from past infection—then they should be equally prepared for a new viral lineage.

Clearly, they're not. "I don't see a consistent thread between countries," Swartzberg said.

There are serious implications for the rest of the world as it braces for BA.2. Even strong vaccine uptake and lingering natural immunity might not spare you a big bump in infections. By the same token, BA.2 might just bypass a country for reasons no one fully understands, like it did with South Africa.

But the experiences of whole countries aren't the experiences of individuals. Yes, BA.2 might have unpredictable effects on populations. But the science is clear on how people can reduce their personal risk. Favor well-ventilated indoor spaces. Wear an N95 mask when local case rates are high.

Most importantly, get vaccinated and boosted.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/03 NKorea warns Seoul of 'serious threat'
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/korea-warns-seoul-threat-missile-remark-83838884
GIST	<p>SEOUL, South Korea -- The influential sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called the South Korean defense minister a "scum-like guy" for talking about preemptive strikes on the North, warning Sunday that the South may face "a serious threat."</p> <p>Kim Yo Jong's statement came amid heightened tensions between the rival Koreas over the North's spate of weapons tests this year, including its first intercontinental ballistic missile launch in more than four years. Some experts say her statement could signal that North Korea will conduct more significant weapons tests soon and take a hardline stance on South Korea.</p> <p>The ICBM test on March 24 that broke North Korea's four-year moratorium on big weapons tests was an embarrassment to South Korea's liberal President Moon Jae-in, who has pushed hard to achieve greater reconciliation between the countries and find a peaceful resolution to the North Korean nuclear crisis.</p>

During a visit to the country's strategic missile command on Friday, South Korean Defense Minister Suh Wook said that South Korea has the ability and readiness to launch precision strikes on North Korea if it detects the North intends to fire missiles at South Korea. Seoul has long maintained such a preemptive attack strategy to cope with North Korea's growing missile and nuclear threats, but it was highly unusual for a senior Seoul official under the Moon administration to publicly discuss it.

On Sunday, Kim's sister, Kim Yo Jong, issued blistering rhetoric directed at Suh and threats toward Seoul.

"The senseless and scum-like guy dare mention a 'preemptive strike' at a nuclear weapons state," Kim Yo Jong said in a statement carried by state media. "South Korea may face a serious threat owing to the reckless remarks made by its defense minister."

"South Korea should discipline itself if it wants to stave off disaster," she said.

Kim Yo Jong, a senior official in the North's ruling Workers' Party, is in charge of relations with Seoul and Washington. South Korea's spy service says she is the North's No. 2 official behind her brother.

Pak Jong Chon, a secretary in the Workers' Party's central committee, separately warned that "any slight misjudgment and ill statement rattling the other party under the present situation" may trigger "a dangerous conflict and a full-blown war."

Pak said North Korea will "mercilessly direct military force into destroying major targets in Seoul and the South Korean army" if South Korea preemptively attacks North Korea.

Relations between the Koreas briefly flourished in 2018 after North Korea abruptly reached out to South Korea and the United States and expressed its willingness to put its nuclear program on the bargaining table. At the time, Kim Yo Jong visited South Korea to attend the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics and conveyed her brother's invitation for Moon to visit the North. Kim Jong Un and Moon eventually met three times in 2018.

But North Korea turned a colder shoulder on Moon and cut off ties with South Korea after its broader nuclear diplomacy with the United States collapsed in 2019 due to disputes over U.S.-led economic sanctions on the North.

"Kim Yo Jong's remarks foreshadow another significant military test," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul. "Similar to how Moscow and Beijing try to gaslight the world that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is somehow the fault of NATO, Pyongyang will blame its nuclear and missile advancements on the U.S.-South Korea alliance."

Analyst Cheong Seong-Chang at the private Sejong Institute in South Korea said that the back-to-back North Korean statements indicate that it will take hardline steps toward South Korea. He said that Pyongyang is sensitive to Seoul's preemptive attack capability because it lacks military assets and capability to detect South Korean strikes in advance.

But Cheong worried that Seoul's public comments on preemptive strikes would result in strengthening the voices of hardline officials in Pyongyang and raising tensions between the Koreas.

Moon's single five-year term ends in May, when he will be replaced by conservative Yoon Suk Yeol, who openly discussed the preemptive attack strategy on North Korea during his campaign. His liberal rivals criticized him for unnecessarily provoking North Korea, but Yoon said he would pursue a principled approach on Pyongyang.

The United States has urged North Korea to return to talks without preconditions, but the North has rejected such an overture saying the U.S. must first drop its hostility toward it. Kim Jong Un has repeatedly vowed to expand his nuclear arsenal as a diplomatic stalemate with Washington continues.

	Some experts say the North's recent missile tests were meant to perfect its weapons technology, boost its leverage in future negotiations with the U.S. and secure stronger internal loyalty. They say North Korea could soon conduct another ICBM launch, a launch of a satellite-carrying rocket or a test of a nuclear device in coming weeks.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 Mayhem: spring break West coast style
SOURCE	https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10680399/Santa-Barbara-EMS-overwhelmed-Deltopia-Spring-Break-mayhem-thousands-pack-streets.html
GIST	<p>The West Coast is getting its own taste of some Spring Break mayhem.</p> <p>Police in Santa Barbara, California, are said to have become 'overwhelmed with medical calls' on Saturday evening after Deltopia celebrations - the city's equivalent of Spring Break - became unruly.</p> <p>Just before 6 p.m., Santa Barbara County Fire declared a 'multi-casualty incident' in Isla Vista, west of downtown Santa Barbara, because of what was described as 'multiple severe traumas and medical emergencies.'</p> <p>A number of calls concerned people falling from buildings.</p> <p>At 1:15 p.m., emergency personnel were sent to Del Playa Drive after it was reported a woman had fallen from a room.</p> <p>Later on Saturday afternoon, paramedics were on the scene after someone fell out of a second-story window on El Nido Lane. No other details were immediately available about their conditions.</p> <p>By Saturday evening, firefighters had treated people with major injuries that included broken bones.</p> <p>Some calls were also for people who had either overdosed on drugs or alcohol, according to SanLuisObispo.com.</p> <p>The chaos started early Friday with three arrests and 20 citations handed out on the first night of Isla Vista's Deltopia weekend, taking place where the University of California Santa Barbara is based. But that appears to have been calm in comparison to Saturday's shenanigans.</p> <p>Firefighters declared the event a 'mass casualty incident' because of the sheer number of patients with medical emergencies,</p> <p>'By declaring an MCI, first responders and the hospitals are able to triage and transport multiple patients to different hospitals more efficiently,' said Daniel Bertucelli, a spokesperson for SBCFD.</p> <p>'It was real busy out there!' he said.</p> <p>The daytime bash known as Deltopia isn't sanctioned by the university or formally planned, but it's a well-known happening the first weekend of the spring quarter in the community next to UC Santa Barbara's campus and picturesque beachside cliffs.</p> <p>Thousands of people are thought to have packed the streets on Saturday in classic Isla Vista garb - bikinis, flip-flops, tank tops and shorts.</p> <p>With drinks in hand, they lined yards in front of two-story apartment buildings and crowded overhanging balconies.</p>

	<p>Streets were littered in glass and garbage cans overflowing with red cups and bottles, as students tried to shake off a lingering hangover from Friday's party before it morphed into a raucous and violent blowout in the streets around one of the nation's best-known party schools.</p> <p>First responders suddenly became so extremely busy Saturday at about 3:30 p.m. that a triage system had to be implemented in which the most serious cases are given priority for medical emergencies.</p> <p>Problems with excessive partying have persisted for decades on this roughly half-square-mile that is home to 23,000 people, but the at-times violence has brought out politicians, university officials, police and student leaders to call for more prudent partying.</p> <p>Deltopia evolved from Floatopia, which started in 2004 and included a beach part. It has been banned since 2009 after it was deemed an environmental and safety hazard because of trash, human waste and near-drownings.</p> <p>Since then, beaches are closed that weekend, and the party migrated a block inland to Del Playa Drive.</p> <p>Authorities ramped up patrols after a Cal Poly San Luis Obispo student fell to her death off the cliffs in 2008 and an overcrowded balcony collapsed, injuring several partygoers.</p> <p>With social media spreading the word, the party has grown in size.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 Putin next move revealed amid retreat
SOURCE	https://www.news.com.au/world/europe/vladimir-putins-next-move-revealed-amid-russian-retreat-from-kyiv/news-story/7de4b1f0402ba55a514067948c917be3
GIST	<p>Vladimir Putin's next move is finally becoming clearer following his surprising decision to pull Russian troops away from the Kyiv area.</p> <p>For more than five weeks, Russian forces have been desperately trying to capture the capital of Kyiv, laying siege to areas around the city in order to press forward with their advance.</p> <p>Civilians have endured weeks of restless shellings, watching their homes reduced to rubble and being cut off from essential supplies.</p> <p>Capturing Kyiv has been Russia's clear goal since the beginning of the invasion on February 24.</p> <p>But that plan has changed, with Mr Putin ordering his forces to retreat from areas around Kyiv and pull back to eastern and southern areas of Ukraine.</p> <p>So what is behind the sudden change in tactics?</p> <p>Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, along with other government officials and military analysts, believe Mr Putin is gearing up for a new offensive.</p> <p>Russia's official explanation for withdrawing from Kyiv was to "increase mutual trust and create conditions for further negotiations" between the two countries.</p> <p>This claim has been met with heavy scepticism for Mr Zelensky, who said Ukraine is "preparing" for what will come next.</p> <p>During his nightly address on Saturday, Mr Zelensky warned Russia was likely planning to increase pressure in the east and south, where Moscow already holds vast swathes of territory.</p>

“We are strengthening our defences in the eastern direction and in Donbas. We are aware that the enemy has reserves to increase pressure in the east,” the Ukrainian leader said.

“What is the goal of Russian troops? They want to capture both Donbas and the south of Ukraine. What is our goal? Protect us, our freedom, our land and our people.”

Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhaylo Podolyak backed up this statement, confirming Russia’s retreat meant the invaders were now “prioritising a different tactic”.

He warned Ukraine still needs more weapons if its forces have a hope of driving Russian troops out.

“(Russia) will leave all territories except the south & east, will try to dig in there, set air defence, drastically reduce losses & dictate terms,” Mr Podolyak wrote on social media.

“Without heavy weapons we won’t be able to drive (Russia) out.”

However, Russian forces that have withdrawn from the north are likely to be heavily impacted from the weeks of combat, meaning they will likely need some time to recover before they can contribute to the military operations in the east and south.

A recent assessment of the situation from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), conducted by researchers Mason Clark, George Barros, and Karolina Hird, revealed it could be days before these troops can “provide meaningful combat power”.

“The Russian units withdrawn from northeastern Ukraine for redeployment to eastern Ukraine are heavily damaged,” the assessment states.

“Russian forces likely require an extensive operational pause to refit existing units in Donbas, refit and redeploy reinforcements from other axes, and integrate these forces — pulled from several military districts that have not yet operated on a single axis — into a cohesive fighting force.

“We have observed no indicators of Russian plans to carry out such a pause, and Russian forces will likely fail to break through Ukrainian defences if they continue to steadily funnel already damaged units into fighting in eastern Ukraine.”

Bodies line the streets in wake of Russian retreat

On Saturday, Ukraine’s Deputy Defence Minister Ganna Maliar announced their forces had taken back the “whole Kyiv region”.

“Irpina, Bucha, Gostomel and the whole Kyiv region were liberated from the invader,” Ms Maliar said.

All three towns have suffered heavy destruction in the five weeks since Russia began its invasion, with civilians facing relentless shelling and artillery fire.

Horror images have emerged showing bodies lining the streets of Bucha, with all the victims appearing to be dressed in civilian clothing,

“All these people were shot, killed, in the back of the head,” Mayor Anatoly Fedoruk told AFP.

Mr Fedoruk said a further 280 victims has already been buried in mass graves across the town.

Another picture, taken on a road between Myrhorod and Mriia, shows a burned body laying next to a burnt out car.

	<p>Mr Podolyak shared graphic images of civilians laying dead in the streets of Bucha with their hands tied behind their backs.</p> <p>“These people were not in the military. They had no weapons. They posed no threat. How many more such cases are happening right now in the occupied territories?” he wrote.</p> <p>Illia Ponomarenko, a defence reporter with The Kyiv Independent, confirmed people had been “executed” in Bucha.</p> <p>“You did it. You are all involved. You allowed it,” Ponomarenko told the Russians.</p> <p>“In the Kyiv region alone, there are still a lot of cities and villages in ruins and with mountains of corpses on the streets.</p> <p>“Live as you wish with this knowledge until the end of your days.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	04/03 Elite Ukraine unit ambushed Russia forces
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/an-elite-ukrainian-drone-unit-on-quad-bikes-ambushed-russian-forces-helping-to-defeat-putin-s-plan-to-capture-kyiv-report-says/ar-AAVOj4a
GIST	<p>Night ambushes carried out by a team of Ukrainian special forces and drone operators on quad bikes have helped turn the tide of the Russian invasion, The Guardian reported.</p> <p>Aerorozvidka is a specialist air-reconnaissance unit within the Ukrainian army, which has claimed to have destroyed dozens of Russian "priority targets," including tanks and command trucks.</p> <p>The unit's commander, Lt Col Yaroslav Honchar, told The Guardian about an ambush near the Ukrainian town of Ivankiv, which helped stop a 40-mile mechanized Russian column heading to attack the capital Kyiv.</p> <p>Equipped with night-vision goggles, sniper rifles, and remotely detonated mines and drones, the team of about 30 Ukrainian soldiers approached Russian forces by riding on quad bikes through forests under cover of night.</p> <p>Some of the drones used by the unit were equipped with thermal imaging cameras, and others were capable of dropping small 1.5kg bombs.</p> <p>"This one little unit in the night destroyed two or three vehicles at the head of this convoy, and after that, it was stuck. They stayed there two more nights and [destroyed] many vehicles," Honchar told The Guardian.</p> <p>After the attack, Russian forces re-strategized by breaking the column into smaller units to try and continue towards the capital.</p> <p>However, the same team mounted an attack on the Russians' supply depot, which stopped them from being able to advance, Honchar told The Guardian.</p> <p>"It all happened because of the work of 30 people," Honchar told the paper.</p> <p>Aerorozvidka was formed in 2014 by a group of young university-educated Ukrainians and IT specialists who volunteered to design their machines to help resist Russia's invasion of Crimea and the Donbas region, according to The Guardian.</p> <p>It was founded by investment banker Volodymyr Kochetkov-Sukach, who was killed in action fighting Russian separatists in Donbas in 2015, the paper said.</p>

	<p>The unit integrated into the Ukrainian general staff following the success of its operations in Crimea.</p> <p>Now, the elite unit, which flies up to 300 missions a day, according to The Times of London, has played a key role in bolstering Ukrainian resistance against Russia.</p> <p>Along with the attack on the Russian convoy, Aerorozvidka claims to have helped defeat a Russian attack on Hostomel airport near Kyiv, The Guardian said.</p> <p>Despite the unit's apparent success, it relies upon crowdfunding and donations to get hold of much-needed components such as advanced modems and thermal imaging cameras. These US and Canada-made parts are subject to export controls that prohibit them from being sent to Ukraine, The Guardian reported.</p> <p>In recent weeks, supporters from around Europe have been donating drone parts and other equipment, such as 3D printers, to help build and repair devices damaged by Russian small-arms fire, per The Times.</p> <p>Aerorozvidka partly operates using Elon Musk's Starlink satellite system, activated in Ukraine days after Russia invaded.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	04/03 Ukraine demands new Russia sanctions
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-demands-new-russia-sanctions-over-massacre-2022-04-03/
GIST	<p>LVIV, Ukraine, April 3 (Reuters) - Ukraine on Sunday demanded crippling new sanctions on Russia from major Western powers over a "massacre" in a town near Kyiv as anger grew in Western capitals and Germany said that those responsible for war crimes should pay.</p> <p>Ukraine said on Saturday that its forces had retaken all areas around Kyiv. The mayor of Bucha, a liberated town 37 km (23 miles) northwest of the capital, said that 300 of its residents had been killed by the Russian army. read more</p> <p>Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba called for international war crimes investigators to visit the area to collect evidence and said Kyiv believed the killing of civilians was deliberate.</p> <p>Russia's defence ministry denied that Russian forces had killed civilians in Bucha, and said all photographs and footage showing dead bodies were "yet another provocation". In a statement, it said all Russian military units had left the town on March 30.</p> <p>Moscow has previously denied allegations that it has targeted civilians, and has rejected accusations of war crimes.</p> <p>U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken described images of large numbers of dead Ukrainians in Bucha following Russia's withdrawal as a "punch in the gut" in an interview with CNN.</p> <p>French Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian condemned what he called the "massive abuses" committed by Russian forces and said Paris would work with Ukraine and the International Criminal Court (ICC) to put those responsible on trial.</p> <p>German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock tweeted: "The images from Bucha are unbearable, Putin's uninhibited violence is extinguishing innocent families and knows no boundaries.</p> <p>"Those responsible for these war crimes must be made accountable. We will tighten the sanctions against Russia and will assist Ukraine even more in defending itself."</p>

	<p>Kuleba called on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to visit Bucha and other towns around Kyiv as soon as possible to work with Ukrainian law enforcement agencies to "thoroughly collect all evidence of Russian war crimes" the ministry quoted him as saying.</p> <p>"We are still gathering and looking for bodies, but the number has already gone into the hundreds," he added. "Dead bodies lie on the streets. They killed civilians while staying there and when they were leaving these villages and towns."</p> <p>On his Telegram channel, he wrote: "Bucha massacre was deliberate."</p> <p>Andriy Sybiha, deputy head of the Ukrainian president's office, called alongside Kuleba for a wave of new measures by the Group of Seven major Western economic powers: extending sanctions to all its banks, closing ports to its ships and imposing an embargo on all trade.</p> <p>"The current sanctions are not having enough of an effect as the war is continuing," he said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/01 Number Covid hospital patients record low
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/covid-business-health-pandemics-norfolk-36714eb4a053fb658e4b58139f2dd9e3
GIST	<p>NORFOLK, Va. (AP) — COVID-19 hospitalization numbers have plunged to their lowest levels since the early days of the pandemic, offering a much needed break to health care workers and patients alike following the omicron surge.</p> <p>The number of patients hospitalized with the coronavirus has fallen more than 90% in more than two months, and some hospitals are going days without a single COVID-19 patient in the ICU for the first time since early 2020.</p> <p>The freed up beds are expected to help U.S. hospitals retain exhausted staff, treat non-COVID-19 patients more quickly and cut down on inflated costs. More family members can visit loved ones. And doctors hope to see a correction to the slide in pediatric visits, yearly checkups and cancer screenings.</p> <p>"We should all be smiling that the number of people sitting in the hospital right now with COVID, and people in intensive care units with COVID, are at this low point," said University of South Florida epidemiologist Jason Salemi.</p> <p>But, he said, the nation "paid a steep price to get to this stage. ... A lot of people got sick and a lot of people died."</p> <p>Hospitalizations are now at their lowest point since summer 2020, when comprehensive national data first became available. The average number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 in the last week nationwide dropped to 11,860, the lowest since 2020 and a steep decline from the peak of more than 145,000 set in mid-January. The previous low was 12,041 last June, before the delta variant took hold.</p> <p>The optimistic trend is also clear in ICU patient numbers, which have dipped to fewer than 2,000, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.</p> <p>"We're beginning to be able to take a breath," said Dr. Jeffrey Weinstein, the patient safety officer for the Kettering Health hospital system in western Ohio.</p> <p>COVID-19 patients had filled 30% of Kettering Health's nearly 1,600 hospital beds back in January, Weinstein said. Kettering's eight hospitals now average two to three COVID-19 admissions a day — and sometimes zero.</p> <p>And while Salemi agreed this is a good time for an exhausted health care system to take a breath, he warned that the public health community needs to keep an eye on the BA.2 subvariant of omicron. It's</p>

driving increases in hospitalizations in Britain, and is now estimated to make up more than half of U.S. infections.

“We’re probably under-detecting true infections now more than at any other time during the pandemic,” Salemi said.

For now at least, many hospitals are noting the low numbers.

In California on Thursday, UC Davis Health tweeted that its intensive care unit had no COVID-19 patients for two consecutive days for the first time in two years.

“The first COVID-19 patient to arrive in our ICU did so in February 2020, and the unit treated at least one positive individual every day since, for at least 761 consecutive days,” the hospital system said.

Toby Marsh, the chief nursing and patient care services officer, said in a statement that they hope the numbers “are indicative of a sustained change.”

In Philadelphia, patients are spending less time in the Temple University Health System because there are no longer backlogs for MRIs, CT scans and lab tests, said Dr. Tony Reed, the chief medical officer.

Temple Health’s three hospitals had six adult COVID-19 patients on Thursday, likely its lowest patient count since March 2020, Reed said.

During the omicron surge, patients waited as long as 22 hours for a routine MRI, which is normally done within 12 hours. Longer waits affected those who came in with trouble walking — and in a lot of pain — for example, because of a herniated disc pinching their sciatic nerve.

“Nobody wants to stay in the hospital a day longer than they have to,” Reed said.

The emptying of beds is also helping patients in rural areas, said Jay Anderson, the chief operating officer for Ohio State’s Wexner Medical Center in Columbus. During the surges, the hospital faced challenges accepting people from community hospitals who needed elevated care for brain tumors, advanced cancer and stroke. That burden is now being lifted.

Visitors also will return in higher numbers, starting Tuesday. Ohio State will no longer restrict patients to two designated guests, who could only stop by separately.

“Patients heal better when they have access to their family and loved ones,” Anderson said.

Doctors, nurses and respiratory therapists are also getting a much needed break in some areas.

In Colorado, Dr. Michelle Barron said the consistently low COVID-19 hospitalizations prompted smiles among staff, even as she double-checks the numbers to make sure they’re actually correct.

“I had one of these moments like, oh this is amazing,” said Barron, medical director of infection prevention and control at UCHealth University of Colorado Hospital. “It feels unreal.”

UCHealth loosened some restrictions, including dropping testing requirements for anyone who entered a facility. And while that produced some anxiety among staffers, Barron says the numbers haven’t spiked.

“I think some people have started to take vacations and not feel guilty,” she said. “I had spring break with my kids and it was a level of happiness where I went, oh my god, this is actually normal.”

The omicron surge had stretched staff at work — but also at home, said Dr. Mike Hooper, chief medical officer for Sentara Norfolk General Hospital in southeastern Virginia.

	<p>“It was stressful to be at the store ... to visit your family,” Hooper said. “We’re all hoping that some ‘return to normalcy’ will help people deal with the inherent stresses of being part of the health care team.”</p> <p>But just because hospitalizations are down does not mean hospitals are empty, said Dr. Frank Johnson, chief medical officer for St. Luke’s Health System in Idaho.</p> <p>Some measures — like wearing masks in certain settings — will remain in place.</p> <p>“I don’t know when we may go back to old practices regarding mask wearing in our clinical areas,” Johnson said. “We’ve seen some benefits of that in terms of reduction in the number of other viral infections.”</p> <p>In the meantime, the public health community is keeping an eye on the BA.2 subvariant of omicron.</p> <p>Salemi, the University of South Florida epidemiologist, said the increase in at-home testing means that more results are not being included in official coronavirus case counts. Therefore, wastewater surveillance will be the early warning signal to watch, he said.</p> <p>“BA.2 is here,” he said. “We don’t have to look that far in the rear-view mirror to know things can change very rapidly. We saw what happened with delta. We saw what happened with omicron.... We don’t want to wait until we see a lot of people hospitalized before we take action.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 Drug shortages persist in Russia
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-health-business-moscow-europe-1e0c675d2e5dfe50665d97a379313aef
GIST	<p>First came the warnings, in messages among friends and families and on social media, to stock up on vital drugs in Russia before supplies were affected by crippling Western sanctions over the invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Then, some drugs indeed became harder to find at pharmacies in Moscow and other cities.</p> <p>“Not a single pharmacy in the city has it now,” a resident of Kazan told The Associated Press in late March about a blood thinner her father needs.</p> <p>Experts and health authorities in Russia say the drug shortages are temporary — due to panic- buying and logistical difficulties for suppliers from the sanctions — but some remain worried that high-quality medicines will keep disappearing in the Russian market.</p> <p>“Most likely there will be shortages. How catastrophic it will be, I don’t know,” said Dr. Alexey Erlikh, head of the cardiac intensive care unit in Moscow Hospital No. 29, and a professor at the Moscow-based Pirogov Medical University.</p> <p>Reports that Russians could not find certain medications in pharmacies started surfacing in early March, shortly after Moscow unleashed a war on Ukraine, and sweeping sanctions left Russia increasingly isolated from the rest of the world.</p> <p>Patient’s Monitor, a patients’ rights group in the Russian region of Dagestan on the Caspian Sea, began getting complaints in the second week of March.</p> <p>Ziyautdin Uvaysov, head of the group, told AP he personally checked with several state-run pharmacies in the region on the availability of 10 most-wanted medications and “they didn’t have a large number of these.”</p> <p>Uvaysov added that when he asked about when supplies would be restocked, the pharmacies replied that “there aren’t any and it’s unclear when there will be.”</p>

Despite assurances from authorities that hoarding of supplies was to blame for the quickly emptying shelves, reports about shortages persisted throughout March.

Vrachi.Rf, one of Russia's biggest online communities for medical workers, surveyed more than 3,000 doctors in mid-March, and they said they had run into shortages of more than 80 medications: anti-inflammatory, gastrointestinal, antiepileptic and anticonvulsant drugs, as well as antidepressants and antipsychotics.

About a dozen people contacted by the AP in different cities in late March said they had spent days searching for certain thyroid medications, types of insulin or even a popular pain-relieving syrup for children. Some said they were unable to find them at all.

"Patients I treat have lost some blood pressure medications," Erlikh said. "And some doctors I know are reporting problems with certain very expensive, very important medications (used in) certain surgical procedures."

Russian Health Minister Mikhail Murashko has repeatedly given assurances that drug availability is not a problem in the country and has blamed any shortages on panic-buying. He said the demand for certain drugs has spiked tenfold in recent weeks, and he has urged Russians not to hoard the medications.

Experts agree that panic-buying has played a role in creating drug shortages.

"People rushed to stock up, and in some cases, supplies that were supposed to last a year or a year and a half were bought out within a month," Nikolay Bespalov, development director of the RNC Pharma analytical company, told AP.

Bespalov also pointed to logistical problems that occurred early in the crisis. While major Western pharmaceutical companies pledged not to withdraw vital medications from the Russian market, sanctions cut Russia's key banks from the SWIFT financial messaging system, hindering international payments. Dozens of countries halted air traffic with Russia, disrupting supply chains.

The expert stressed the logistical issues have been largely resolved, but panic-buying, prompted by fears that foreign companies will halt supplies, may continue fueling shortages for some time.

"Clearly, until the emotions calm down, it will continue," Bespalov said.

Local news sites — from Vladimir, just east of Moscow, to the Kemerovo region in Siberia — reported shortages of various medications in the final days of March amid continued panic-buying.

Russia's health care watchdog Roszdravnadzor, however, said in a statement Friday that "the situation on the drug market is gradually returning to normal, panic-buying of pharmaceuticals is decreasing."

Erlikh, the cardiologist, pointed to already-existing problems with quality medications in Russia, which according to some estimates imports up to 40% of its drugs.

After authorities launched an import substitution policy to counter sanctions over the 2014 annexation of Crimea and to promote its own medications over foreign-made ones, shortages of certain imported drugs became a problem.

The policy outlined a wide range of preferences to Russian businesses and eventually made it unprofitable for foreign pharmaceutical companies to supply some of their expensive, high-quality drugs to Russia.

In 2015, state procurement of drugs for hospitals and state-funded clinics, which account for up to 80% of Russia's pharmaceutical market, became subject to the "three's a crowd" rule, which excluded foreign businesses if at least two Russian companies were bidding for a contract.

	<p>The government also kept adding more drugs to the “vital medicines” list -- a registry of over 800 essential drugs, for which the authorities set obligatory — and relatively low — prices. Companies can apply for changing the set price once a year, but the process is long, heavily bureaucratic and doesn’t lead to a guaranteed result.</p> <p>“We have already been gradually losing one important original medication after another. Generics are taking their place, and while there are some rather good ones made in Europe, there are also some dubious ones made in Russia,” Erlikh said.</p> <p>“Of course, when there is no original medication, a generic is better than nothing. But it is a situation of (deliberately) lowering the bar, it is not a good way to live,” he added.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/02 Day 38 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/02/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-38-of-the-russian-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy has said the military situation in the country’s east remained extremely difficult. He repeated warnings that Russia was preparing for strikes in the Donbas region and Kharkiv. In a video address late on Friday, he said Russian troops in the north of the country were slowly pulling back. • Zelenskiy also said that Russia was trying to conscript troops from Crimea, but said that being drafted to fight in Ukraine was “guaranteed death for many young guys”. He warned their families: “We don’t need more dead people here. Save your children so they do not become villains. Don’t send them.” • Ukraine exchanged 86 members of their armed forces with Russia today, according to senior Ukrainian officials. • Russia says Ukrainian helicopters attacked an oil storage facility in Belgorod, Russia, about 16 miles from the border and close to Kharkiv, destroying fuel tanks. Ukrainian officials have denied their forces were involved. • The UK Ministry of Defence says the destruction of oil tanks at a depot in the Russian city of Belgorod means probable loss of fuel and ammunition supplies to invading forces. It will likely add more strain to Russia’s already stretched logistic chains. Supplies to Russian forces encircling Kharkiv may be particularly affected. • The US department of defense will provide an additional \$300 million in security assistance to Ukraine, to include laser-guided rocket systems, drones, and commercial satellite imagery services. • The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, earlier spoke with Ukraine’s foreign minister Dmytro Kulebo today and discussed “ways the US allies and partners are helping Ukraine defend against Putin’s unprovoked and unjustified war”, Blinken said. • The US State Department said Washington will continue to provide support to Ukraine and won’t push the country to make concessions in negotiations with Russia following a report that said Britain was concerned the US, France and Germany will push Ukraine to “settle” in a peace deal. • The US military has cancelled plans to test an intercontinental ballistic missile in an effort to reduce tensions with Russia. • Zelenskiy also said more than 3,000 people had been led to safety from the besieged city of Mariupol. More than 6,000 in total had been rescued from Mariupol, Donetsk, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia. The International Committee of the Red Cross said it had been unable to reach the city but will try again to evacuate civilians on Saturday. • The Hollywood actor Sean Penn has called for a billionaire to come forward and buy two squadrons of F-15 or F-16 aircraft for Ukraine in an unlikely attempt to tip the scales against the Russian invaders in the five-week-old war.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European governments have more time to figure out how they are going to act on Russia's demand to pay for Russia gas in rubles after the Kremlin said today that it would not immediately halt gas supplies • Around 200 Ukrainian national guard members have likely been taken prisoner by the Russian troops as they withdrew from the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, the mayor of Slavutych, Yuri Fomichev, said.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 Secret intel unusual public role Ukraine war
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-boris-johnson-travel-lifestyle-8266fc649415566554d6e3bc8e42fcc9
GIST	<p>LONDON (AP) — The war in Ukraine is the conflict where spies came in from the cold and took center stage.</p> <p>Since Russia invaded its neighbor in late February, intelligence agencies in the U.S. and Britain have been remarkably willing to go public with their secret intelligence assessments of what is happening on the battlefield — and inside the Kremlin.</p> <p>The U.S. this week declassified intelligence findings claiming Russian President Vladimir Putin is being misinformed about his military's poor performance in Ukraine by advisers scared to tell him the truth. On Thursday a British spy chief said demoralized Russian troops were refusing to carry out orders and sabotaging their own equipment.</p> <p>Jeremy Fleming, who heads Britain's electronic intelligence agency GCHQ, made the comments in a public speech where he said the "pace and scale" at which secret intelligence is being released "really is unprecedented."</p> <p>Mark Galeotti, a Russia expert at University College London, agreed that the very public intelligence campaign "reflects the fact that we now live in a different age, politically and internationally. And this is a different kind of war."</p> <p>Officials say the stream of declassified intelligence — which includes regular briefings to journalists in Washington and London and daily Twitter updates from Britain's defense ministry — has several aims. Partly it's to let Putin know he is being watched, and to make him question what he's being told. It's also designed to embolden the Russian military to tell Putin the truth, and to convey to the Russian public that they have been lied to about the war.</p> <p>The U.S. and Britain also have released intelligence assessments in a bid to deter Russian actions. That was the case with recent warnings Russia might be preparing to use chemical weapons in Ukraine.</p> <p>It's all part of a closely coordinated trans-Atlantic strategy that has been in the works for months.</p> <p>Biden administration officials say they decided to aggressively share intelligence and coordinate messaging with key allies, including Britain, as U.S. concerns about Russian troop movements in autumn 2021 put the intelligence community on high alert.</p> <p>In early November, President Joe Biden dispatched CIA director William Burns to Moscow to warn that the U.S. was fully aware of Russian troop movements. The White House has typically been tight-lipped about the director's travels, but the Biden administration calculated that in this situation they needed to advertise the visit far and wide. The U.S. Embassy in Moscow announced that Burns had met with top Kremlin officials shortly after his trip was over.</p> <p>Soon after Burns' Moscow mission, U.S. officials decided they needed to accelerate intelligence sharing.</p>

Officials shared sensitive intelligence with other members of the Five Eyes alliance — Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand — and also with Ukraine. Director of national intelligence Avril Haines was dispatched to Brussels to brief NATO members on intelligence underlying growing American concerns that Russia seemed intent on invasion, according to a U.S. official familiar with the matter, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive issue.

Some allies and analysts were skeptical, with memories lingering of past intelligence failings, like the false claim Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction that was used to justify the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

Late last year, France and Germany led a group of European countries that appeared to be seeing similar military intelligence as the U.S. and Britain, but were less convinced that an invasion of Ukraine was imminent. At NATO, Germany initially blocked the use of a system for helping Ukraine to acquire certain military equipment. France and Germany also blocked NATO from launching an early crisis planning system in response to the buildup, before relenting in December.

This week, French media reported that the head of France's military intelligence agency, which failed to anticipate the Russian invasion, has been removed from his post.

Eric Vidaud's departure comes amid soul-searching among France's leadership about why it was taken by surprise by the war — which was particularly embarrassing for President Emmanuel Macron, who speaks regularly with Putin. Some see Vidaud as a scapegoat, and note that his removal comes just ahead of this month's French presidential election.

In January, as Russia amassed troops near Ukraine's border, Britain's Foreign Office issued a statement alleging that Putin wanted to install a pro-Moscow regime in Ukraine. The U.K. said it was making the intelligence assessment public because of the "exceptional circumstances."

Russia's invasion on Feb. 24 largely silenced the doubters, and drew a unified response from NATO. The release of U.S. and British intelligence is partly designed to shore up that Western unity, officials and analysts say. Both Biden and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson doubt Putin is serious about negotiating an end to the war and want to keep up the West's military and moral support of Ukraine.

The impact inside Russia is hard to measure. The U.S. official who spoke to the AP said the White House hopes divulging intelligence that Putin is misinformed could help prod the Russian leader to reconsider his options in Ukraine. But the publicity could also risk further isolating Putin or make him double down on his aim of restoring Russian prestige lost since the fall of the Soviet Union.

The official said Biden is in part shaped by a belief that "Putin is going to do what Putin is going to do," regardless of international efforts to deter him.

Galeotti said Western intelligence agencies likely don't know how much impact their efforts will have on Putin.

"But there's no harm in giving it a try," he said. "Because when it comes down to it, in this kind of intensely personalistic system (of government), if one line, or one particular notion, happens to get through and lodge itself in Putin's brain, then that's a really powerful result."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/01 Intel failure: misjudged Russia capabilities
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/1/intel-failure-us-misjudged-russian-weaknesses-ukra/
GIST	U.S. intelligence agencies misjudged Russia's military capabilities in the weeks leading up to the invasion of Ukraine, and also believed Ukraine's military was ill-prepared to resist and would be quickly defeated, according to military and intelligence officials.

Both those intelligence judgments were wrong, officials have disclosed recently to Congress, and now the scramble is on to determine why.

Bad intelligence on Ukraine — and the failure of intelligence regarding the resilience of the U.S.-backed government in Afghanistan last year — are in part to blame for what some critics in Congress say is the Biden administration's missteps so far in reacting to the fighting in Ukraine and other global crises. Correct intelligence on Russian and Ukrainian militaries, the critics say, could have resulted in a more rapid and effective arming of Kyiv's forces prior to the Feb. 24 invasion and more effective support as the five-week war grinds on.

For example, the Pentagon delayed sending 1,000 Javelin tank missiles to Ukraine that were requested by the Polish government in the weeks before the war.

Air Force Gen. Tod Wolters, NATO's senior general and commander of the European Command, said there appear to be shortcomings with intelligence, including gaps in reporting prior to Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to invade.

"There could be a gap [in intelligence] and I think what we owe our citizens is once we get into a post-conflict environment to go back and examine that very issue to make sure if there is in fact a gap, we rectify it," Gen. Wolters told the House Armed Services Committee on Wednesday.

The U.S. wasn't the only Western nation dealing with the poor quality of its pre-war intelligence. General Eric Vignaud, the chief of French intelligence, stepped down this week reportedly over his failure to accurately predict the Russian military invasion in February. French President Emmanuel Macron was one of the most prominent Western to make a last-minute appeal to Mr. Putin not to invade, at a time when President Biden and his aides were insisting the Kremlin was already determined on war.

"The Americans said that the Russians were going to attack, and they were right," French General Thierry Burkhard told Le Monde newspaper in an interview March 6. "Our services instead said that the conquest of Ukraine would have a monstrous cost and that the Russians had other options" to pressure the Kyiv government to make concessions.

In addition to faulty assessments of the strength of Russian and Ukrainian forces, U.S. intelligence agencies also made questionable calls on the impact of sending Soviet-era MiG jets to Ukraine and warnings of Russian cyberattacks that so far have not materialized.

Under questioning from several House members on Wednesday, Gen. Wolters said "at this point, I agree with you that there was a degree of miscalculation and it's evidenced by the performance of the Russian military up to this point."

Spokespeople for the House and Senate intelligence oversight committees did not respond when asked if the committees will review the U.S. intelligence performance related to Ukraine.

Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Chairman Mark Warner said this week American intelligence agencies accurately predicted in late 2020 and early 2021 how extensive the Russian invasion would be, at a time when many European governments, including the Ukrainians, did not believe a major Russian attack was coming.

France's government this week fired the director of military intelligence, Gen. Eric Vignaud, after his agency concluded in February that a large Russian invasion of Ukraine was unlikely, contrary to U.S. warnings, according to European news reports.

Intelligence agencies accurately predicted that the invasion would be from multiple routes, and not limited to eastern Ukraine. Intelligence agencies also said Mr. Putin was seeking to take over the entire country, Mr. Warner said.

Three “surprises” for U.S. intelligence — often a euphemism for intelligence failures — were misestimates of the Ukrainian military’s ability to fight; poor judgments of the low quality of Russian military logistics and the Russian army’s ability to fight; and the vulnerability of tanks in modern warfare, Mr. Warner said on CNN.

“The notion that Russia, which we do know was throwing some of its best troops into this invasion, was so inept in the operation of materials logistics, I guess that would be a surprise,” the Virginia Democrat said.

Rep. Scott DesJarlais, Tennessee Republican, said he is increasingly concerned by the quality of U.S. intelligence assessments over the past year, including on Ukraine and Afghanistan, where spy agencies wrongly predicted a U.S. military withdrawal would not result in the immediate collapse of the U.S.-backed government in Kabul.

Taliban insurgents took over the country days after the U.S. military completed a chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan in August.

“The intel community did a great job in predicting the invasion, the amount of troops, the number of tanks, but here we are on Day 34, 35 and I don’t think it was gamed beyond, you know the initial two to three days,” Mr. DesJarlais told Gen. Wolters.

Mr. DesJarlais said Congress relies on intelligence assessments to allocate resources for weapons, as do policymakers in the Pentagon and State Department.

Gen. Wolters said the closed nature of Mr. Putin’s regime made it “very difficult” to assess the Kremlin’s military calculus related to Ukraine.

“We need to go back and take a look at our soft areas and make sure we fix those,” he said.

Ukraine and Iran

Sen. Tom Cotton, Arkansas Republican, said during a recent hearing that intelligence was misused in what he termed the “fiasco” of first supporting and then denying an offer by Poland to supply MiG-29s from its fleet to Ukraine, using a U.S. base in Germany as a transshipment site. The Pentagon nixed the offer, calling it “not feasible.”

Mr. Cotton said he did not believe there was intelligence to support the administration’s decision to cancel the jet transfer after first approving it, and that the concurrent negotiations to revive the Iran nuclear deal influenced the U.S. decision.

“I have concerns that part of the reason the administration went relatively soft on Russia and was hesitant in Ukraine in 2021 was that they were relying on Russia to get the bad nuclear deal” with Iran, Mr. Cotton said.

Gen. Scott D. Berrier, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said DIA analysts conducted several studies examining what he termed an “escalation ladder” involving the range of actions that could take place in the Ukraine war and determined that the jets would lead to a broader conflict. However, under questioning from Mr. Cotton, the DIA director acknowledged his agency has made significant analytical mistakes already about the conflict.

The first was that DIA underestimated the ferocity of Ukrainian resistant to the invasion. “That was a bad assessment on my part,” he said.

The DIA also overrated Russia’s military capabilities and judged that Mr. Putin’s bigger and better-armed forces would quickly overrun Ukraine. “We made some assumptions about his assumption which proved to be very, very flawed,” Gen. Berrier said.

Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines said she believed intelligence analysts working for her office underestimated the logistical and other problems now facing the Russian military. Analysts, however, correctly gauged that Mr. Putin would misjudge the intense level of Ukrainian resistance, she said.

“These mistakes had potentially real-world policy implications about the willingness of the president and other NATO leaders to provide weapons that they thought might have fallen into the hands of Russians in a matter of hours,” Mr. Cotton said.

So far at least, the conflict has also not produced the large-scale and debilitating cyberattacks from Russia’s formidable army of hackers that were anticipated by U.S. intelligence agencies. Gen. Paul Nakasone, commander of U.S. Cyber Command and director of the National Security Agency, said earlier this month that major cyberattacks could still be forthcoming.

The general said his agencies worked with the Ukrainian to bolster cyber security, sending military cyber teams to Kyiv. NSA and private sector security experts also contributed to electronic defense efforts.

“These are all impacts that I think have played out positively early on,” he said. “And I think to a degree, there’s still obviously a Russian calculus that will play out here, and we will be very, very vigilant to see what occurs there.”

Rep. Jason Crow, Colorado Democrat and member of the Armed Services Committee, defended the efforts of U.S. intelligence during the conflict. He said Mr. Biden and his aides were sounding the alarm about Mr. Putin’s military plans before the war when even the Ukrainian government said U.S. fears were overblown.

“I sit on both the Armed Services and the [Intelligence] committees, and I have to say we nailed it,” Mr. Crow said. “Starting back last fall, we started to determine what was happening. We were ringing the alarm bells, and we engaged in an unprecedented public engagement and private engagement with our allies, with the international community, declassifying information, getting the Ukrainians prepared to address this,” he said.

The activities were “one of our generation’s finest intelligence successes,” he added.

“There’s always room for improvement,” Mr. Crow added. “That’s why we [have after-action reports], but I think it’s important to say that the intelligence community and the military did an exceptional job.”

A spokesperson for the DNI declined to comment. A CIA spokesperson had no immediate comment. A spokesperson for the DIA did not respond to a request for comment.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/02 Pentagon: \$300M Ukraine weapons package
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/2/pentagon-announces-300-million-weapons-package-ukr/
GIST	<p>The Pentagon has announced \$300 million in additional aid to Ukraine.</p> <p>The latest package includes a bevy of unmanned aerial systems, secure communications, and laser-guided rockets among other equipment aimed at bolstering “Ukraine’s capacity to defend itself.”</p> <p>“This decision underscores the United States’ unwavering commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity in support of its heroic efforts to repeal Russia’s war of choice,” Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said Friday.</p> <p>President Biden has signed off on more than \$1.6 billion in aid to Ukraine since the start of the war, including Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, Javelin anti-tank missiles, and millions of rounds of small arms ammunition while imposing harsh sanctions on the Russian economy.</p>

Earlier this month Congress passed its omnibus government funding bill which included \$13.6 billion in aid to Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has pleaded with Western allies to help Ukraine battle Russia's bombardment of his country with a NATO-enforced no-fly zone and fighter jets to protect Ukraine's skies. NATO countries have rejected those requests for fear of being drawn into a direct war with Moscow.

The president has walked a fine line to avoid further escalating the war. Earlier this month, the administration scuttled an offer by Poland to supply Kyiv with Soviet-era MiG fighter jets that would be transshipped through a U.S. military base in Germany. The Pentagon said the Polish offer as structured was "not feasible" and could prove provocative to Russia.

The administration is weighing options to backfill Slovakia with U.S.-made missile defense systems to accommodate the transfer of S-300 surface-air missiles to Ukraine.

Earlier this month, Slovakia's Defense Minister Jaroslav Nad offered to transfer Soviet-era systems in Slovakia's inventory to Ukraine, but said any transfer would require a "proper replacement."

Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Celeste Wallander told a House Armed Services Committee hearing this week that the U.S. was still considering the proposal.

A National Security Council spokesperson said that the administration "strongly" supports transferring anti-air systems to Ukraine.

"We have provided more than 1,000 of our anti-aircraft systems to Ukraine, and helped the Ukrainians acquire other Soviet- and Russian-made air defense systems they've been trained to use, including helping replenish munitions for those systems," the spokesperson said. "We want to see air defense equipment continue to move into Ukraine, so we are working closely with our Slovakian allies on their requests."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/03 Ukraine president faces new set challenges
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/04/03/zelenky-putin-peace-deal-ukraine-politics/
GIST	<p>Nearly every day, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, clad in dark green, records a video address to the Ukrainian people, sometimes seated at a desk, other times standing outside in the dark of the night. Lately, he has been warning of difficulties yet to come.</p> <p>"We all equally want to win — all of us — but there will be battles ahead," Zelensky said Thursday, with street lamps illuminating Kyiv's ornate House of Chimeras, part of the government complex, behind him. "We still have a difficult path to travel to get everything we are striving for."</p> <p>Among the most challenging paths is that facing Zelensky himself.</p> <p>The 44-year-old Ukrainian comedian has evolved from a political neophyte, widely doubted among Western leaders and Ukrainian voters in the run-up to the war, into a crisis commander who has cemented his place in the history of Ukrainian nationhood and inspired a will to resist at home and abroad with personal bravery.</p> <p>Now, as the war grinds on in its sixth week and peace talks between Ukrainian and Russian negotiators continue, Zelensky faces a new set of challenges. He must keep up morale and the will to fight amid battlefield casualties, economic devastation and vast civilian suffering. He must retain the confidence of Western nations that Ukraine can prevail to ensure weapons keep flowing.</p>

But as time goes on he must also figure out what if any sort of political agreement with Moscow to end the war will be acceptable to a Ukrainian population riding high after repelling Russian forces in many areas and feeling inspired to resist by his own actions and words.

“He has relied on intense feelings of nationalism to continue to fight this war, but those are exactly the forces that make it extremely difficult to put this war to an end,” American University political science professor Keith Darden said, noting that it’s unclear how long Ukraine can keep up the fight. “That’s the real dilemma in my mind.”

Zelensky for months has unsuccessfully been seeking a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin to discuss Moscow’s myriad demands. David Arakhamia, head of the Ukrainian delegation to the talks, said Saturday that Kyiv is preparing for a possible meeting between Zelensky and Putin in Turkey.

For Zelensky, however, any deal with the Kremlin is politically fraught.

One effect may be to prolong the war if Zelensky doesn’t feel he has the public backing to make the compromises necessary to stop it. Another might be that his extraordinary public support erodes in service of a peace agreement.

Zelensky has been laying the groundwork with Ukrainians to end the country’s constitutionally enshrined quest to enter NATO, noting that the alliance isn’t prepared to accept Kyiv. He has focused efforts instead on securing European Union membership.

The Ukrainian leader has shown flexibility and practicality, defining victory in an interview with the Economist last month as “being able to save as many lives as possible.”

“Our land is important, yes, but ultimately it’s just territory,” he said.

At the same time, however, he pledged to fight Russia “to the last city.”

Zelensky also has warned Ukrainians that the Russians are likely regrouping to focus on attacking a more targeted set of areas, particularly those where Ukrainian forces may face the most difficulty — and has called on Ukrainians to steel themselves for a long conflict.

“Right now everyone is eager to resist — eager if not to win, then to batter Russia as much as possible,” said Mikhail Minakov, a political analyst on Ukraine at the Kennan Institute. “He is in a sort of Catch-22. He tries to find the possible way of staying in this position, remaining charismatic, but at the same time to find a solution.”

Underestimated in Moscow and the West

After playing Ukraine’s president in a popular TV series, Zelensky entered office in 2019 with extraordinary popular support, commanding 73 percent of the vote, as well as a majority for his party in the Ukrainian parliament. He attracted a broad and disparate swath of voters with his populist outsider appeal and promise to end the war in Ukraine’s east.

But by late last year, as Russia amassed troops and materiel on Ukraine’s border, Zelensky’s approval rating had plummeted to about 30 percent. Met with Russian intransigence and Ukrainian political constraints, he failed to end the war. His inexperienced team realized the difficulty of implementing big changes.

Russia’s invasion appeared to indicate the Kremlin also thought little of Zelensky, expecting the former actor to flee Kyiv out of fear for his own life in a manner that would hobble the country’s ability to resist.

Zelensky was equally underestimated among Ukraine’s partner nations in the West, where many officials viewed him as an inexperienced and somewhat unpredictable leader who failed to appreciate the seriousness of the security situation. In the days before the war, Zelensky’s advisers expressed doubts

Russia would invade. One senior adviser, reflecting the atmosphere around Zelensky, insisted the Russians were “bluffing” and looking only to intimidate Ukraine.

Russian forces had massed on the border before and backed down. The aide said he saw no reason to believe that this time would be different — and blamed the Biden administration for stoking panic with talk of an invasion. He said that Zelensky’s main responsibility was to avoid a run on banks and capital flight from the country.

But career officials within Ukraine’s national security apparatus agreed with U.S. and British intelligence assessments that Russia was likely to invade. They were frustrated in their own efforts to persuade Zelensky and felt his closest advisers weren’t telling him the hard truth that an invasion looked imminent, said one senior Ukrainian official.

In mid-January, CIA Director William J. Burns flew to Ukraine and met with Zelensky. According to people familiar with their conversation, Burns shared intelligence that had persuaded U.S. officials about Russia’s intentions. At the time, intelligence also suggested that Russian hit teams might already be in Kyiv, according to officials familiar with the information who, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive diplomacy and intelligence.

Zelensky asked if he and his family were personally in danger. The CIA director made clear that the president needed to take his security seriously. Zelensky was skeptical, the Ukrainian officials said. The Zelensky senior adviser said that the information Burns shared sounded dire but, in his opinion, wasn’t specific enough for the Ukrainians to act. U.S. officials have disputed that characterization, noting that by the time Zelensky and Burns met, the Biden administration had already declassified intelligence including satellite photos that showed Russian forces moving into attack formations.

Zelensky didn’t call on his citizens to evacuate or authorize a general mobilization. Cafes and shops in the capital remained open until the very last moment. A former Western intelligence official in Kyiv at the time said he was bewildered that the government wasn’t conducting frequent tests of air raid warning sirens and public drills.

For much of January, as the United States and other NATO allies delivered one warning after another to the Ukrainians of the buildup on their border, Kyiv’s political world was focused on treason accusations against Zelensky’s predecessor, former president Petro Poroshenko.

A hero emerges

After the Russians invaded and tried to make a lightning dash into Kyiv, Zelensky demonstrated far more mettle than politicians in both Russia and the West had expected, refusing to leave the capital even as those intent on killing him tried to enter the city.

“I was positively surprised,” Minakov said. “I myself see the emotion of this charisma. I respect him for what he is doing — and that is an unusual feeling. In Ukraine, we don’t usually respect politicians.”

Even after Zelensky’s display of courage, many around the world still expected him to be killed by Russian invaders in Kyiv or forced to flee the capital within days. But the Ukrainian military performed far better than many expected. The Russians, meanwhile, bungled their assumptions and logistics, stalling the advance on the capital.

With the prospect of finally meeting Putin in person for peace talks, Zelensky is armed with a groundswell of political support, as well as battlefield successes. He faces a test of whether he can parlay that political capital into a lasting peace acceptable among most Ukrainians.

It’s unclear if the moment is right, as Russian forces still appear determined to take more territory in the east, and Ukraine so far remains unwilling to give up any of the land Russia has claimed since Feb. 24.

	<p>Serhiy Leshchenko, a former member of Ukraine’s parliament now advising Zelensky’s chief of staff, said despite the desire to continue resisting, there are perhaps less-vocal Ukrainians under siege who want and need an agreement to stop the fighting.</p> <p>“People living under bombing in Mariupol, Kharkiv and Chernihiv have much less access to social media than people in a safe place,” Leshchenko said, before noting the dilemma facing Zelensky.</p> <p>“People want to stop the war. People want normal life to come back,” Leshchenko said. “People want to defend Ukraine from the aggressor. People don’t want to lose territory and sovereignty.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 Pakistan PM dissolves parliament
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/03/imran-khan-pakistan-elections-no-confidence-vote/
GIST	<p>ISLAMABAD, Pakistan – Pakistan’s embattled prime minister, Imran Khan, outmaneuvered his political opponents Sunday as they attempted to oust him from power through a vote of no confidence. Within two hours, Parliament had been dissolved at Khan’s request so the country can prepare for new elections.</p> <p>Khan orchestrated an abrupt suspension of the expected no-confidence vote by the legislature’s acting speaker, a member of his party, then immediately announced on live TV that new elections would be held.</p> <p>As an uproar spread through the legislative chamber, furious opposition leaders accused Khan of treason and declared they would immediately go to the Supreme Court to demand that the vote be held as planned. By late afternoon, however, the court had taken no action to challenge the vote cancellation and the shuttering of Parliament, which Pakistan’s president ordered to prepare for elections.</p> <p>Opposition leaders, as of Saturday, had gathered enough supporting votes among legislators to oust Khan from power as he struggled to manage spiraling inflation and other domestic crises. But Khan, 69, a charismatic former cricket star who won office in 2018 after campaigning to reform a corrupt political system and bring justice to all Pakistanis, blamed the effort to oust him on a foreign conspiracy that he claimed was backed by the United States.</p> <p>He had vowed to resist the no-confidence measure and called on supporters Saturday to hold peaceful protests across the country.</p> <p>“I congratulate the nation. The speaker has rejected the effort at regime change that was planned by outsiders,” Khan said in his brief televised statement Sunday. “The nation will not allow this conspiracy to succeed. The assembly will be dissolved and we will go back to the people. We will prepare for new elections and you will decide the future of Pakistan.”</p> <p>In recent weeks, as he was fighting for his political life, Khan has repeatedly alleged that the U.S administration was behind a plot to remove him from power, citing a private diplomatic cable that suggested Washington would be happier with new leaders in Pakistan. But the cable has not been made public, and a spokesman for the State Department has said there is “no truth” to the accusations.</p> <p>The controversy has plunged Pakistan’s troubled democratic system into chaos, pitting its civilian institutions against each other and turning the legislative process into a brawl. It has also placed new strains on Pakistan’s long but uneasy relations with the United States, which have veered from Cold War and anti-terror cooperation to mutual blame over meddling in Afghanistan. Khan’s government is now much closer to China, its most important economic and political ally.</p> <p>Khan, who came to power as a populist domestic reformer, has increasingly refashioned himself as a devout Muslim and ardent nationalist. In recent speeches, tinged with messianic fervor, he depicted his struggle for political survival as a “war for the future of our country” and said Pakistan must choose between being a proud, independent nation or submitting like “slaves” to foreign interests.</p>

	It is unclear how Pakistan's powerful military establishment will respond to this fast-developing political crisis. The army has a long history of interfering with domestic and electoral politics, and Khan's relationship with military officials has cooled since they tacitly backed his candidacy in 2018. But the current army leaders have pledged to remain neutral in civilian politics, even as Khan has battled to remain in office.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/02 Cuts in Britain cause Covid data drought?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/02/health/covid-testing-uk-denmark.html
GIST	<p>The British government on Friday shut down or scaled back a number of its Covid surveillance programs, curtailing the collection of data that the United States and many other countries had come to rely on to understand the threat posed by emerging variants and the effectiveness of vaccines. Denmark, too, renowned for insights from its comprehensive tests, has drastically cut back on its virus tracking efforts in recent months.</p> <p>As more countries loosen their policies toward living with Covid rather than snuffing it out, health experts worry that monitoring systems will become weaker, making it more difficult to predict new surges and to make sense of emerging variants.</p> <p>"Things are going to get harder now," Samuel Scarpino, a managing director at the Rockefeller Foundation's Pandemic Prevention Institute, said. "And right as things get hard, we're dialing back the data systems."</p> <p>Since the Alpha variant emerged in the fall of 2020, Britain has served as a bellwether, tracking that variant as well as Delta and Omicron before they arrived in the United States. After a slow start, American genomic surveillance efforts have steadily improved with a modest increase in funding.</p> <p>"This might actually put the U.S. in more of a leadership position," said Kristian Andersen, a virologist at Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla, Calif.</p> <p>At the start of the pandemic, Britain was especially well prepared to set up a world-class virus tracking program. The country was already home to many experts on virus evolution, it had large labs ready to sequence viral genes, and it could link that sequencing to electronic records from its National Health Service.</p> <p>In March 2020, British researchers created a consortium to sequence as many viral genomes as they could lay hands on. Some samples came from tests that people took when they felt ill, others came from hospitals, and still others came from national surveys.</p> <p>That last category was especially important, experts said. By testing hundreds of thousands of people at random each month, the researchers could detect new variants and outbreaks among people who didn't even know they were sick, rather than waiting for tests to come from clinics or hospitals.</p> <p>"The community testing has been the most rapid indicator of changes to the epidemic, and it's also been the most rapid indicator of the appearance of new variants," said Christophe Fraser, an epidemiologist at the University of Oxford. "It's really the key tool."</p> <p>By late 2020, Britain was performing genomic sequencing on thousands of virus samples a week from surveys and tests, supplying online databases with more than half of the world's coronavirus genomes. That December, this data allowed researchers to identify Alpha, the first coronavirus variant, in an outbreak in southeastern England.</p> <p>A few other countries stood out for their efforts to track the virus's evolution. Denmark set up an ambitious system for sequencing most of its positive coronavirus tests. Israel combined viral tracking with</p>

aggressive vaccination, quickly producing evidence last summer that the vaccines were becoming less effective — data that other countries leaned on in their decision to approve boosters.

But Britain remained the exemplar in not only sequencing viral genomes, but combining that information with medical records and epidemiology to make sense of the variants.

“The U.K. really set itself up to give information to the whole world,” said Jeffrey Barrett, the former director of the Covid-19 Genomics Initiative at the Wellcome Sanger Institute in Britain.

Even in the past few weeks, Britain’s surveillance systems were giving the world crucial information about the BA.2 subvariant of Omicron. British researchers established that the variant does not pose a greater risk of hospitalization than other forms of Omicron but is more transmissible.

On Friday, two of the country’s routine virus surveys were shut down and a third was scaled back, baffling Dr. Fraser and many other researchers, particularly when those surveys now show that Britain’s Covid infection rates are estimated to have reached a record high: one in 13 people. The government also stopped paying for free tests, and either canceled or paused contact-tracing apps and sewage sampling programs.

“I don’t understand what the strategy is, to put together these very large instruments and then dismantle them,” Dr. Fraser said.

The cuts have come as Prime Minister Boris Johnson has called for Britain to “learn to live with this virus.” When the government released its plans in February, it pointed to the success of the country’s vaccination program and the high costs of various virus programs. Although it would be scaling back surveillance, it said, “the government will continue to monitor cases, in hospital settings in particular, including using genomic sequencing, which will allow some insights into the evolution of the virus.”

It’s true that life with Covid is different now than it was back in the spring of 2020. Vaccines drastically reduce the risk of hospitalization and death — at least in countries that have vaccinated enough people. Antiviral pills and other treatments can further blunt Covid’s devastation, although they’re still in short supply in much of the world.

Supplying free tests and running large-scale surveys is expensive, Dr. Barrett acknowledged, and after two years, it made sense that countries would look for ways to curb spending. “I do understand it’s a tricky position for governments,” he said.

But he expressed worry that cutting back too far on genomic surveillance would leave Britain unprepared for a new variant. “You don’t want to be blind on that,” he said

With a reduction in testing, Steven Paterson, a geneticist at the University of Liverpool, pointed out that Britain will have fewer viruses to sequence. He estimated the sequencing output could drop by 80 percent.

“Whichever way you look at it, it’s going to lead very much to a degradation of the insight that we can have, either into the numbers of infections, or our ability to spot new variants as they come through,” Dr. Paterson said.

Experts warned that it will be difficult to restart surveillance programs of the coronavirus, known formally as SARS-CoV-2, when a new variant emerges.

“If there’s one thing we know about SARS-CoV-2, it’s that it always surprises us,” said Paul Elliott, an epidemiologist at Imperial College London and a lead investigator on one of the community surveys being cut. “Things can change really, really quickly.”

Other countries are also applying a live-with-Covid philosophy to their surveillance. Denmark’s testing rate has dropped nearly 90 percent from its January peak. The Danish government announced on March 10 that tests would be required only for certain medical reasons, such as pregnancy.

Astrid Iversen, an Oxford virologist who has consulted for the Danish government, expressed worry that the country was trying to convince itself the pandemic was over. “The virus hasn’t gotten the email,” she said.

With the drop in testing, she said, the daily case count in Denmark doesn’t reflect the true state of the pandemic as well as before. But the country is ramping up widespread testing of wastewater, which might work well enough to monitor new variants. If the wastewater revealed an alarming spike, the country could start its testing again.

“I feel confident that Denmark will be able to scale up,” she said.

Israel has also seen a drastic drop in testing, but Ran Balicer, the director of the Clalit Research Institute, said the country’s health care systems will continue to track variants and monitor the effectiveness of vaccines. “For us, living with Covid does not mean ignoring Covid,” he said.

While Britain and Denmark have been cutting back on surveillance, one country offers a model of robust-yet-affordable virus monitoring: South Africa.

South Africa rose to prominence in November, when researchers there first discovered Omicron. The feat was all the more impressive given that the country sequences only a few hundred virus genomes a week.

Tulio de Oliveira, the director of South Africa’s Centre for Epidemic Response & Innovation, credited the design of the survey for its success. He and his colleagues randomly pick out test results from every province across the country to sequence. That method ensures that a bias in their survey doesn’t lead them to miss something important.

It also means that they run much leaner operations than those of richer countries. Since its start in early 2020, the survey has cost just \$2.1 million. “It’s much more sustainable,” Dr. de Oliveira said.

In contrast, many countries in Africa and Asia have yet to start any substantial sequencing. “We are blind to many parts of the world,” said Elodie Ghedin, a viral genomics expert at the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

The United States has traveled a course of its own. In early 2021, when the Alpha variant swept across the country, American researchers were sequencing only a tiny fraction of positive Covid tests. “We were far behind Britain,” Dr. Ghedin said.

Since then, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has helped state and local public health departments start doing their own sequencing of virus genomes. While countries like Britain and Denmark pull back on surveillance, the United States is still ramping up its efforts. Last month, the C.D.C. announced a \$185 million initiative to support sequencing centers at universities.

Still, budget fights in Washington are bringing uncertainty to the country’s long-term surveillance. And the United States faces obstacles that other wealthy countries don’t.

Without a national health care system, the country cannot link each virus sample with a person’s medical records. And the United States has not set up a regularly updated national survey of the sort that has served the United Kingdom and South Africa so well.

“All scientists would love it if we had something like that,” Dr. Ghedin said. “But we have to work with the confines of our system.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/02 Lithuania halts Russia gas imports
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/02/world/europe/lithuania-russia-gas.html

GIST	<p>BERLIN — Lithuania has stopped importing natural gas from Russia as of April and will be able to rely instead on deliveries from other countries to meet its energy needs, the country’s president announced on Saturday, saying the move was an example for other European Union members.</p> <p>Before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the E.U. had been looking for ways to reduce its dependency on Russian fossil fuels, including coal and oil, but especially gas. Nearly 40 percent of the bloc’s total natural gas came from Russia. But since Moscow ordered tanks into Ukraine on Feb. 24, member states have been more actively seeking ways to cut their gas needs.</p> <p>“If we can do it, the rest of Europe can do it too,” Gitanas Nauseda, Lithuania’s president, said on Twitter on Saturday.</p> <p>While Lithuania is a tiny country with only 2.8 million people and an economy more reliant on trade than industry, it is the largest economy in the Baltic States and also a member of the eurozone. So while losing Lithuania as a customer is unlikely to significantly hurt Gazprom, Russia’s state-owned energy group, the move has geopolitical significance in setting a precedent for the E.U.</p> <p>“I think it is a symbolic step by Lithuania, which has long tried to be in the vanguard of reducing and potentially eliminating its dependence on Russian gas,” said Katja Yafimava, a senior research fellow at the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies. She added that Germany, France and Italy could not easily make a similar move because they rely on much higher volumes of Russian gas and are bound to long-term contracts.</p> <p>Lithuania borders on the Russian territory of Kaliningrad and was once fully dependent on imports of Russian gas — a legacy of the country’s history as part of the former Soviet Union. But construction of a liquefied natural gas terminal in 2014 allowed it to begin moving away from dependence on Russia.</p> <p>Last week, President Vladimir V. Putin threatened to cut off gas supplies to “unfriendly countries,” unless the countries started paying for the supplies in rubles. European leaders rejected the idea, but it remained unclear how the standoff might be resolved. Germany and Italy, especially, are heavily dependent on Russian gas, although Germany has recently secured partnerships with the United States and other energy-rich countries.</p> <p>President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine has called on E.U. countries to stop buying gas from Russia, going so far as to urge Qatar and other energy producers to increase their gas exports to Europe as part of a drive to reduce the continent’s reliance on Russian fossil fuels.</p> <p>Earlier this year, Lithuania’s energy minister said the country was able to order enough deliveries of LNG to meet its energy needs. If necessary, it can also receive gas deliveries via a link with Latvia.</p> <p>“We are the first E.U. country among Gazprom’s supply countries to gain independence from Russian gas supplies, and this is the result of a multiyear coherent energy policy and timely infrastructure decisions,” Dainius Kreivys, the country’s energy minister, said in a statement on Saturday.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/01 Deadly climate pairing of fire, then floods
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/01/climate/wildfire-extreme-rain-mudslides.html
GIST	<p>Global warming is greatly increasing the risk that extreme wildfires in the American West are followed by heavy rainfall, a new study has found, highlighting the need for better preparations for hazards, like mudslides and flash floods, that can cause devastation long after the flames from severe blazes are out.</p> <p>Fires ravage forests, wreck homes and kill people and animals, but they also destroy vegetation and make soil less permeable. That makes it easier for even short bursts of heavy rain to cause flooding and runaway flows of mud and debris. Rains after wildfires can also contaminate drinking water by choking rivers and basins with sediment from eroded hillsides.</p>

Scientists believe that human-caused climate change is bringing about more of the hot and dry conditions that lead to catastrophic fires. Warmer air can hold more moisture, which means rainfall is growing more intense, too.

Until now, though, climate researchers studying the Western United States hadn't tried pinning down how often those two opposite extremes might occur in the same place within a short span of time, said Danielle Touma, a postdoctoral fellow at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colo., and lead author of the new study.

Three months to half a year after a fire, before the soil and vegetation have had time to recover, "are the times when these events can be really risky," Dr. Touma said. The study was published on Friday in the journal *Science Advances*.

Residents of Western states have seen plenty of these one-two punch weather disasters, and their harrowing consequences, in recent years.

In Montecito, Calif., mudslides killed more than 20 people and destroyed hundreds of homes in early 2018, just a month after huge wildfires there sheared the landscape. Severe flooding and mudslides last summer forced Colorado to shut down Interstate 70, a key artery for the entire Western United States, following record fires in the state the year before. Experts believe that wildfires during last year's record heat wave in the Pacific Northwest worsened the damage from intense downpours that came less than six months later.

The new study uses computer models to project how the frequency of such combined events across the West might change under a high-global-warming scenario for the coming decades.

Climate scientists believe it is less likely than it once was that greenhouse-gas emissions from human activity will bring about such high levels of warming on their own. The authors of the study said that they expected smaller but still significant increases in rainfall following wildfires under less-pessimistic pathways for global warming.

The study finds that by the end of the century, more than half of days with extremely high wildfire risk in parts of the Pacific Northwest, Idaho, Nevada and Utah could be followed by severe downpours within a year. The fraction is smaller for California and Colorado, the study found, though it is still considerably more than the average between 1980 and 2005. And the increase is significant both within six months of severe fire days and within a year.

Western Colorado and most of the Pacific Northwest are also projected to see a jump in the chance of heavy rains within three months of dangerous fire conditions. In California, the wildfire season and the rainy season tend to be more separate during the year.

"Even by midcentury, some places are seeing a doubling or tripling" of risk, said Daniel L. Swain, a climate scientist at the University of California, Los Angeles, and another author of the study. "That's not that far in the future, and that's not that much more additional warming than we've already seen."

Dr. Swain said he and his colleagues were struck that their computer models showed such a consistent increase in risk across the West, even though the region's climate is so varied. California has dry summers and wet winters, while in Colorado, both flooding and wildfire peak during the warm season.

It doesn't take much rain to trigger a debris flow on a recently burned slope, said Jason W. Kean, a hydrologist with the United States Geological Survey in Golden, Colo., who was not involved in the study. In some areas, as little as a fraction of an inch falling in 15 minutes might be enough, he said.

	<p>But as more wildfires occur in places where they hadn't been a big problem before, scientists are working to understand how the thresholds might differ in those wetter climates, Dr. Kean said. "It's a scramble for us to stay ahead of the game," he said.</p> <p>Dr. Touma conducted most of the analysis for the new study when she was a postdoctoral researcher at the University of California, Santa Barbara, not far from Montecito, which was devastated by post-fire mudslides in 2018. The authorities there had urged residents of certain areas to evacuate, but many chose not to.</p> <p>"There was a lot of evacuation fatigue from the fire just one month before," Dr. Touma said.</p> <p>Residents of the West are generally very conscious of the risks of flooding and mud flows in burn zones, said Samantha Stevenson, an environmental scientist at the University of California, Santa Barbara, who also worked on the study. But "the degree to which they are increasing as a result of climate change, and the rapidity of that increase, is something that we should maybe try to be more aware of," she said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 Protests over shortages roil Sri Lanka
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/sri-lanka-blocks-social-media-amid-calls-for-more-protests/
GIST	<p>COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Opposition lawmakers and people angered by the government's handling of Sri Lanka's worst economic crisis on Sunday marched to denounce the president's move to impose a nationwide curfew and state of emergency, as protests over food and fuel shortages swelled.</p> <p>Internet users were unable to access Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp and other social media platforms for nearly 15 hours on Sunday after authorities blocked access.</p> <p>Apparently due to the growing criticism, access to social media was later restored. The platforms have been used to organize protests calling for President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to resign, saying he is responsible for the country's deepening economic woes.</p> <p>Sri Lanka is under a nationwide curfew until Monday morning after Rajapaksa assumed emergency powers at midnight Friday. More protests were taking place throughout the country on Sunday as anger over people waiting in long lines for essential foods, fuel and hourslong rotating power cuts boiled over.</p> <p>Facebook posts showed crowds of young people shouting anti-government slogans and singing songs.</p> <p>The emergency declaration by Rajapaksa gives him wide powers to preserve public order, suppress mutiny, riot or civil disturbances or for the maintenance of essential supplies. Under the decree, the president can authorize detentions, seizure of property and search of premises. He can also change or suspend any law except the constitution.</p> <p>In the capital, the lawmakers marched toward Colombo's main square, shouting slogans and carrying placards that read "Stop Suppression" and "Gota go home." Gota is a shortened version of the president's first name.</p> <p>Armed soldiers and police officers set up barricades on the road leading to the square, which was built to commemorate the country's independence from Britain in 1948.</p> <p>"This is unconstitutional," opposition leader Sajith Premadasa told troops who prevented the lawmakers from walking to the square. "You are violating the law. Please think of the people who are suffering. Why are you protecting a government like this?"</p> <p>Another lawmaker, Nalin Bandara, said: "How long can they rule under emergency? The first instance when the curfew is lifted, people are going to be back on the streets."</p>

	<p>Sri Lanka faces huge debt obligations and dwindling foreign reserves, and its struggle to pay for imports has caused a lack of basic supplies. People wait in long lines for gas, and power is cut for several hours daily because there's not enough fuel to operate power plants and dry weather has sapped hydropower capacity.</p> <p>The island nation's economic woes are blamed on a failure of successive governments to diversify exports, instead relying on traditional cash sources like tea, garments and tourism, and on a culture of consuming imported goods.</p> <p>The COVID-19 pandemic dealt a heavy blow to the economy with the government estimating a loss of \$14 billion in the last two years. Protesters also point to mismanagement — Sri Lanka has immense foreign debt after borrowing heavily on projects that don't earn money. Its foreign debt repayment obligations are around \$7 billion for this year alone.</p> <p>The crisis has hit people from all walks of life. Middle class professionals and business people who would normally not take part in street protests have been holding nightly rallies with candles and placards in many parts of the country.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 Life, death under Russia occupation
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/03/world/europe/ukraine-war-russia-trostryanets.html
GIST	<p>TROSTYANETS, Ukraine — The last three Russian soldiers in this Ukrainian town are in the morgue, their uniforms bloodied and torn. The first one's face is frozen in pain. The second has his wooden pipe in his lap. The third is stuffed in his sleeping bag.</p> <p>These dead are not all that was left behind in Trostyanets, a strategically located town in the country's northeast, where Russian forces fled several days ago in the face of an orchestrated Ukrainian assault. A monthlong Russian occupation reduced much of the town to rubble, a decimated landscape of mangled tank hulks, snapped trees and rattled but resilient survivors.</p> <p>There are also stories, impossible to verify, highlighting the kind of hate left in an occupation's wake and sharing a common thread of brutality: children held at knife point; an old woman forced to drink alcohol as her occupiers watched and laughed; whispers of rape and forced disappearances; and an old man found toothless, beaten in a ditch and defecated on.</p> <p>"Oh, God, how I wanted to spit on them or hit them," said Yevdokiya Koneva, 57, her voice steely as she pushed her aging bicycle toward the center of town on Friday.</p> <p>Ukrainian forces are now gaining ground, as more than a month into the war Russian forces are pulling back from their positions north of Kyiv, even as Ukrainian soldiers are making progress here in the northeast. This area was supposed to be little more than a speed bump for a sprawling military campaign that would quickly take the country's capital and leave the east in Russian hands.</p> <p>Instead, a combination of logistics issues, low morale and poor planning among Russian forces allowed an emboldened Ukrainian military to go on the offensive along multiple axes, grinding down the occupying forces and splintering their front lines.</p> <p>The Ukrainian victory in Trostyanets came on March 26 — what residents call "Liberation Day" — and is an example of how disadvantaged and smaller Ukrainian units have launched successful counterattacks.</p> <p>It also shows how the Russian military's inability to win a quick victory — in which they would "liberate" a friendly population — left their soldiers in a position that they were vastly unprepared for: holding an occupied town with an unwelcoming local populace.</p>

“We didn’t want this dreadful ‘liberation,’” said Nina Ivanivna Panchenko, 64, who was walking in the rain after collecting a package of humanitarian aid. “Just let them never come here again.”

Interviews with more than a dozen residents of Trostyanets, a modest town of about 19,000 situated in a bowl of rolling hills roughly 20 miles from the Russian border, paint a stark picture of struggle and fear during the Russian occupation. The unrelenting violence from both Ukrainian and Russian forces fighting to retake and hold the town raged for weeks and drove people into basements or anywhere they could find shelter.

On Friday, dazed residents walked through the destroyed town, sorting through the debris as some power was restored for the first time in weeks. Viktor Panov, a railway worker, was helping to clear the shrapnel-shattered train station of unexploded shells, grenades and other scattered explosives. Other men cannibalized destroyed Russian armored vehicles for parts or working machinery.

“I can’t wrap my head around how this war with tanks and missiles is possible,” said Olena Volkova, 57, the head doctor at the hospital and the deputy head of the town council. “Against who? The peaceful civilians?”

“This is true barbarity,” she said.

The war began in Trostyanets on Feb. 24, the day the Russians launched their invasion of Ukraine. The town quickly became a thoroughfare for advancing Russian tank columns as they punched farther west, part of their northeastern offensive toward Kyiv, the capital. Thousands of armored vehicles rolled through, breaking highway guard rails and chewing up roads.

“As the Russians drove in, for the first two days, our guys fought back well, so long as they had heavy weapons,” said Mr. Panov, 37. “After they ran out of those, they were left only with rifles.”

Farther west, the offensive blitz toward Kyiv soon encountered fierce Ukrainian resistance, stopping the Russians short of the capital, meaning that soldiers would have to occupy Trostyanets rather than just move through it. Roughly 800 troops fanned out, constructing a dozen or so checkpoints that cut the town into a grid of isolated neighborhoods.

Residents say they rarely tried to move through the Russian positions, though they described the occupying soldiers as amiable enough in the first days of the occupation, and more confused than anything.

“The first brigade of Russian forces that came in were more or less tolerable,” Dr. Volkova said. “They said, ‘OK, we will help you.’”

That help, Dr. Volkova explained, was just allowing them to pull the corpses of the dead off the streets. She added that roughly 20 people had been killed during the occupation and the ensuing fighting — 10 had suffered gunshot wounds.

On a few occasions, the Russian troops opened “green corridors” for civilians to leave the town, though that was when some people — mostly younger, military-age men — were abducted.

Early in the occupation, Trostyanets’s police officers took off their uniforms and blended into the populace. Those who were in Ukraine’s Territorial Defense, the equivalent of the National Guard, slipped out to the town’s periphery and worked as partisans — documenting Russian troop movement and reporting it to the Ukrainian military.

Others remained in the town, quietly moving to help residents where they could, even as Russian soldiers hunted them. “We were here during the whole time of occupation, working to the best of our abilities,” explained the police chief, Volodymyr Bogachyov, 53.

As the days and weeks went by, food became scarce and any good will from the soldiers vanished, too. Residents boiled snow for water and lived off what they had stored from their small gardens. Russian soldiers, without a proper logistics pipeline, began looting people's homes, shops and even the local chocolate factory. One butcher spray painted "ALREADY LOOTED" on his shop so the soldiers would not break in. On another store, another deterrence: "EVERYTHING IS TAKEN, NOTHING LEFT."

By mid-March, the Russian soldiers were rotated out of the town and replaced by separatist fighters who were brought in from the southeast.

It was then, residents said, that atrocities began to mount.

"They were brash and angry," Dr. Volkova said. "We could not negotiate with them about anything. They would not give us any green corridors, they searched the apartments, took away the phones, abducted people — they took them away, mostly young men, and we still don't know where these people are."

As of Friday, the town's police had received 15 reports of missing people.

In the morgue, beside the three dead Russian soldiers, Dr. Volkova pointed to a body bag in the corner of the room. "This person was tortured to death," she said. "His hands and legs are tied up with sticky tape, his teeth are missing and almost all of his face is gone. It's unknown what they wanted from him."

Outside the town, Ukraine's 93rd Mechanized Brigade, a unit of experienced veterans who had seen combat off and on in the country's separatist regions for the past seven years, slowly moved into position. Then, on March 23, they attacked with a bombardment of artillery fire.

The next day, the town's hospital was shelled. It is not entirely clear who hit the building, but local residents accuse the Russians of firing into the structure. The hospital had been operational for the duration of the occupation, treating everyone, including Russian soldiers. During the shelling, only one doctor and one nurse were still working there, and they moved into the basement with patients.

"In the morning, we went away on foot with the last two women still remaining in the maternity ward, one pregnant and one that had just given birth," said Xenia Gritsayenko, 45, a midwife who had returned to work on Friday to clean up the ward. Tank shells had gone through the walls, shredding baby posters and lighting at least one room on fire. "It was the cry from the bottom of the soul."

The Russian forces fled on the night of the 25th. Their demolished artillery position in the train station square showed signs of an undersupplied and ad hoc force. Fortifications included ammo-crates loaded with sand and thick candy bar wrappers bundled in rolls and used to shore up shattered windows instead of sandbags. Uniforms lay in soaked puddles. Russian supply documents blew aimlessly in the wind.

A nearby monument that commemorates the World War II victory to retake the town, affixed with an aging Soviet tank, was damaged, but not destroyed. It had survived one more battle.

By Friday afternoon, Mr. Bogachyov, the police chief, was sorting through reports of townspeople who had collaborated with the former occupiers, as well as trying to address continued looting. Yet no one had issues siphoning fuel from the abandoned Russian tanks dotting the roads.

"The info is such as, 'This person was talking or drinking vodka with the Russians,' and, 'This person pointed to them where is the home of the person they were looking for,'" he said.

"There is no information on collaborations such as our citizens taking arms along with the occupants or treating their own citizens with violence," Mr. Bogachyov said, acknowledging that it was hard to tell if he was contending with Russian spies or just neighborly grudges.

The morning rain had burned off by the afternoon. The long lines around humanitarian aid distribution points dissipated. A garbage truck meandered by, loaded to the brim with war detritus and Russian army

	<p>rations. A few people took selfies in front of the last Russian piece of self-propelled artillery that was still recognizable.</p> <p>Galyna Mitsaii, 65, an employee of the local seed and gardening supplies shop near the train station, slowly restocked her shelves, pleased at how the day's weather had turned out.</p> <p>"We will sow, we will grow, we will live," she said, crying.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 US relations Saudi Arabia, UAE hit new low
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/03/us-relations-saudi-arabia-uae-oil-crisis
GIST	<p>As Joe Biden moved to open US strategic oil reserves, his two biggest oil-producing allies have kept their tanks firmly shut. The UAE and Saudi Arabia continue to rebuff the US president as he attempts to counter soaring oil prices prompted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. And both countries have been unusually frank about their refusal to step in.</p> <p>The five-week-old war is bringing tensions to a head in several parts of the world, but perhaps nowhere is a regional order more under strain than the Middle East, where two of America's biggest allies are now seriously questioning the foundations of their relationship.</p> <p>The Saudi and Emirati refusal to bail Biden out – or even to take his calls – has pushed relations between the Gulf states and Washington to an unprecedented low. The extraordinary flow of Russian wealth to Dubai, just as the US and Europe try to strangle Putin's economy, has inflamed things further.</p> <p>Add to that the still-sputtering talks between Washington and Tehran, which could see sanctions reprieves in return for Iran returning to the Obama-era nuclear deal, and there are clear signs of a faltering friendship – with the potential to rewrite the geopolitics of the region.</p> <p>Usually opaque and often inscrutable, officials in Abu Dhabi and Riyadh have in recent weeks been uncharacteristically blunt to visiting diplomats about the nature of their grievances, and how far they are prepared to take them. One western diplomat told the Guardian that a Saudi counterpart had said: "This is the end of the road for us and Biden, but maybe the US also."</p> <p>Prominent Saudi and Emirati commentators shared the same sentiments. The former al-Arabiya editor-in-chief, Mohammed al-Yahya chose the previously unlikely forum of the Jerusalem Post to publish his views on the standoff.</p> <p>"The Saudi-US relationship is in the throes of a crisis," he wrote. "I am increasingly disturbed by the unreality of the American discussion about the subject, which often fails to acknowledge just how deep and serious the rift has grown.</p> <p>"A more realistic discussion should focus on one word: divorce. When Barack Obama negotiated the nuclear deal with Iran, we Saudis understood him to be seeking the breakup of a 70-year marriage.</p> <p>"How could we not? After all, the flaws in the deal are well known. It paves a path for Iran to a nuclear bomb. It fills the war chest of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which has spread militias across the Arab world armed with precision-guided munitions to maim and kill people who formerly looked to America to help guarantee their safety.</p> <p>"Why should America's regional allies help Washington contain Russia in Europe when Washington is strengthening Russia and Iran in the Middle East?"</p> <p>Al-Yahya contrasted Washington's demands with Beijing's no-strings diplomacy, saying: "While American policy is beset by baffling contradictions, Chinese policy is simple and straightforward. Beijing</p>

is offering Riyadh a simple deal: sell us your oil and choose whatever military equipment you want from our catalogue; in return, help us to stabilise global energy markets.

“In other words, the Chinese are offering what increasingly appears modelled on the American-Saudi deal that stabilised the Middle East for 70 years.”

In recent months, Brett McGurk, the White House coordinator for the Middle East, has been a frequent visitor to Riyadh, trying to calibrate a relationship that soured soon after Biden’s inauguration, when he refused to speak to Saudi Arabia’s de facto leader, Mohammed bin Salman.

That stance set the tone for the standoff that has followed. And both Prince Mohammed and his counterpart in the UAE, Mohamed bin Zayed, remain deeply wary of the administration’s determination to push through the nuclear deal, which would give Iran comprehensive sanctions relief in return for abandoning the capacity to build a nuclear weapon.

A perceived lack of support from Washington for the Saudi-led campaign against Houthis in Yemen has added to the angst. And so too has an approach of an administration that Riyadh and Abu Dhabi believe is willing to sacrifice allies for idealism. The naked transactional diplomacy of Donald Trump was a formula more familiar to both, and had been readily deployed by China, to whom each is looking towards for closer trade, energy and even security ties.

Professor Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, a noted scholar in political science, described the crisis with Washington as the worst in “50 years”.

He laid a litany of gripes at the doors of the White House, which he said had built up particularly during the Biden administration.

Writing in the Lebanese daily Annahar, he said: “The UAE’s relationship with the US partner is at stake, at a crossroads. It is certain that the task of fixing the misunderstanding falls on the shoulders of the Biden administration, which may be on the verge of losing a regional partner that is increasingly self-confident and has an increasing regional and global presence.

“The UAE has invested a lot in its relations with Washington. We allocated the bulk of our investments of huge sovereign wealth funds in the American markets, excluding Asian and European markets, and had wanted to increase trade with Washington.”

Abdulla said the UAE felt snubbed by Washington not signing a deal to supply new F-35 fighter jets. It was also angered by Biden’s distance following a deadly Houthi drone and rocket strike on Abu Dhabi.

“What made matters worse was the Biden administration’s objection to sovereign Emirati decisions, such as receiving Bashar al-Assad ... and putting pressure on Abu Dhabi to increase its oil production outside the context of the Opec agreement.

“All this comes at a time when America is no longer the only superpower in the world, which prompted the UAE and other countries to diversify partners.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/02 Analysis of why Russia army has stalled
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/02/friendly-fire-blunders-confusion-low-morale-why-russias-army-has-stalled
GIST	Uniforms are one of the most deceptive trappings of military culture. They suggest uniformity but it is often said of the British army that if two officers look the same, one must be improperly dressed. Armies, and especially professional armies, are more often warring tribes of subcultures, and for commanders it is critical to understand how those cultures interact if the force is to be employed effectively in battle.

When it comes to Russian military culture, the Russian army has been through a period of significant change, with constant modernisation since 2008. The Soviet Union fielded an army of more than 3.5 million soldiers in 1991. The Soviet army was largely a conscript force and lacked an experienced noncommissioned officer corps. This meant that Soviet units had to be treated with a degree of uniformity, since the personnel rotated so frequently that most line units were necessarily commanded using set formulas that formed the basis for unit training.

Today's Russian military is much smaller with about 1 million personnel across all services. For the army, conscripts today make up only about 35% of the force. The high proportion of contract soldiers should produce a more distinct unit culture. This is reinforced by how units have been fighting. Among Russia's higher-readiness forces, the wars in Ukraine and Syria have seen fighting being conducted primarily at the level of the company group, producing units with contract troops who have fought together, but rarely in large formations.

This process of experience being concentrated into small units of action has been further accelerated by the expansion of Russian special purpose units. FSB (security service) units have for a long time been focused on repressive counter-terrorism alongside Chechen troops, who are well equipped but largely lack experience of heavy fighting. GU and KSO "special purpose troops", meanwhile, have tended to operate in small teams – sometimes down to pairs – behind enemy lines. Although the Russian officer corps has been rotated through Donbas and Syria, the scale of activity they managed there has been limited.

As well as disparities in experience between Russian military units, there is also the different geographic focus of various formations. Russia spans 11 time zones, and consequently its military districts are confronted with very different problems. The Western Military District was positioned to confront Nato. The Southern Military District was set up for expeditionary operations. The Northern Military District is responsible for the high north, and the Eastern Military District guards Vladivostok and the Chinese border. Because formations in these regions are aligned to a variety of threats, they receive different equipment, with the eastern district usually the last to get upgraded vehicles and gear.

The challenge that Russia has struggled to address is that while its force has become increasingly fragmented into units where experience is largely confined to company-sized or at most battalion-sized actions, Russia's political aspirations have far exceeded the capacity of these formations. Battalion tactical groups operating under independent brigades, for example, proved logistically inadequate in 2015, leading to the reintroduction of divisions to manage supply.

Preparing for the war in Ukraine, Russia has drawn troops from across its military districts, fielding 190,000 personnel from units that have rarely worked together and that use a wide range of equipment of varying vintage.

Further complexity emerges from the mobilisation of raw recruits from the occupied Luhansk and Donetsk enclaves, the deployment of interior riot police and Rosgvardia (national guard) troops, meant for crowd control rather than warfighting, and Wagner mercenaries. Some Rosgvardia personnel have refused to deploy to Ukraine. Wagner include some experienced soldiers, though their track record in offensive operations is poor. They have also not previously participated in large-scale Russian military exercises, making it ambiguous how they are to be commanded in the field.

Planning to deploy such a diverse force would usually require careful consideration as to how units with different equipment, experience, culture and training levels would interact and complement one another. The sequencing of which units would attack first would be carefully worked out. Instead, these units have largely been committed piecemeal, using the same roads, with limited efforts to establish effective control measures or assign battlespace. Although units were given markings to indicate their axis of advance, many formations have become intermingled, causing friendly fire incidents and confusion, and cratering morale.

Slowly, Russian senior officers have begun to impose order on operations, but with too many troops pushed forward, too few reserves and insufficient logistical support, they are paying a heavy price for

	early blunders. In many respects, the Russian military has been caught between its political aspirations to fight large wars, and the experience of its soldiers, which has been confined to small ones.
Return to Top	
HEADLINE	04/03 Russian anti-war protesters fly new flag
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/03/red-is-dead-russian-anti-war-protesters-fly-a-new-flag-for-peace
GIST	<p>When Putin’s forces invaded Ukraine, anti-war Russians such as Kai Katonina, a 31-year-old designer who lives in Berlin, joined protests around the world. Katonina held up a sign that read “No to war”, but few in the crowd knew that they (Katonina’s preferred pronoun) were Russian.</p> <p>They said: “Onlookers thought we were Ukrainians because our people look the same. It was crucial for us to stand apart and show that Russians also oppose the war. We needed to identify ourselves.”</p> <p>Katonina said it was obviously impossible to go to the protests with the country’s traditional white, blue and red flag. “Unfortunately, the Russian tricolour has been completely appropriated by the state propaganda and the military,” Katonina said. “We needed a flag that had no connection to violence and war.”</p> <p>So Katonina and their friends came up with a solution: a white, blue and white striped flag. “It is as if someone threw white paint over the red, over the bloodshed that is going on,” Katonina said.</p> <p>But they were not the only ones to have the idea – it was soon seen at other protests around the world. “It was funny to see that at the very same time, other Russians opposing the war were putting forward the very same flag. Some unconscious collaboration was going on,” they said.</p> <p>The flag was originally used in Veliky Novgorod, one of the oldest cities in Russia and known as the cradle of national democracy – its citizens were full participants in representative rule as early as the 12th century.</p> <p>“The Veliky Novgorod symbolism was important to us. It was as democratic as a place could be in the 12th century,” Katonina said.</p> <p>The flag has since been embraced on social media as well as by Russian anti-war protesters on the streets.</p> <p>Russian poets, artists and musicians, as well as Russia’s main opposition movement, led by supporters of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, have also backed the use of the flag.</p> <p>The Free Russia Forum in Vilnius, a leading opposition group outside the country, called the new flag a symbol “of peace and freedom”. The group said: “Why is the new symbol important? Because it frees Russians of their ties to the Kremlin. By showing this flag, we – Russians – can say no to the war, no to dictatorship, and no to censorship. This isn’t the symbol of a state, it’s a symbol of people joining together.”</p> <p>Katonina said they were also inspired by the events in Belarus, where thousands of protesters used a white-red-white striped flag during rallies after the country’s disputed elections.</p> <p>This flag, first used during the short-lived Belarusian national republic in 1918, became such an irritant to the regime of President Alexander Lukashenko that even people wearing socks in its colours have faced prosecution.</p> <p>Unsurprisingly, the new Russian flag has also drawn the ire of the Kremlin, and officials last week proposed banning it as an “extremist” symbol.</p>

	<p>Vladimir Putin and state media have sought to create their own pro-war symbols. Most notably, the Latin letter Z has gone from being a military marking to the main sign of public support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>But the new Russian flag has gained more traction among the country's large émigré communities, which have been swollen by Russians who have left the country since the outbreak of the war.</p> <p>As Putin is effectively criminalising dissent over the war, tens of thousands of Russians have departed, and the main hubs of organised opposition movements are now abroad. Like-minded Russians have since been gathering at protests and anti-war concerts in cities across Europe, including Istanbul, London, Riga and Warsaw.</p> <p>At one of those concerts, given recently by the prominent Russian rapper Oxxxymiron, hundreds of Russians came together at the O2 Shepherd's Bush Empire in London.</p> <p>"Millions of Russians are against this war," the rapper said, as he stood over a cheering crowd ... some of them waving the new flag.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	04/03 Day 39 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/03/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-39-of-the-russian-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukrainian troops have retaken the entire Kyiv region, but they have discovered widespread evidence of what the Kyiv government says are war crimes committed by Russian forces. This includes bodies found in the streets, evidence of killings of civilians, mass graves and murdered children. • One woman interviewed by the Guardian, Halyna Tovkach, says her husband was killed by Russians along with two children and their mother while they were trying to flee the fighting in Bucha. Also allegedly among the civilians killed by the Russians was Olha Sukhenko, the head of the village Motyzhin east of Kyiv, and her entire family. • Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelenskiy and a number of other authorities have accused Russian troops of leaving behind mines and other explosives in their retreat of the Kyiv region. In Irpin, crews have found 643 explosive objects. • Russia has specifically been accused by Ukraine's attorney general of using children as "human shields" while regrouping its forces, as the first witness accounts from the newly liberated town of Bucha, north-west of Kyiv, emerge. Coaches of children were said to have been placed in front of tanks in the village of Novyi Bykiv, close to the encircled city of Chernihiv, 100 miles north of Kyiv. • Zelenskiy repeated his warning that Russian troops want to capture the Donbas and the south of Ukraine. In his nightly video address, the Ukraine president said "we are aware that the enemy has reserves to increase pressure in the east" but complained that western allies had not sent enough anti-missile systems. • A series of explosions were heard and smoke was seen in Ukraine's southern port city of Odesa in the early hours of Sunday, witnesses said. • Ukraine's peace negotiator reportedly said that Russia "verbally" accepts the Ukrainian position on peace talks, AFP reported, except for the issue of Crimea. Moscow had also agreed that a referendum on the neutral status of Ukraine "will be the only way out of this situation." • Turkey is the likeliest venue for peace talks between Zelenskiy and Vladimir Putin, Interfax Ukraine has reported. • A Red Cross convoy heading to Mariupol will try again to evacuate civilians from the besieged port as Russian forces appeared to be regrouping for new attacks in the south-east. A spokesperson for the Red Cross said: "Our team is on the move this morning from Zaporizhzhia to Mariupol. I'm not able to give further information at this stage."

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maksim Levin, a Ukrainian photographer, was also found dead near Kyiv. The defence ministry said Levin, whose work appeared in reports from the BBC and Reuters, had been shot twice by Russian soldiers. • The UK said authorities were working to collect evidence of Russian war crimes. Liz Truss, Britain's foreign secretary, tweeted that she was looking at new information coming out of the Kyiv region. • The Baltic states have halted all Russian oil imports, and are encouraging the rest of the European Union to follow suit. • UK military intelligence says Russia has still not been able to destroy Ukraine's air force and air defences. This failure has "seriously hampered their efforts to gain broad control of the air, which in turn has significantly affected their ability to support the advance of their ground forces on a number of fronts". • Pope Francis has come the closest he has yet to implicitly criticising Vladimir Putin over Russia's invasion of Ukraine, by saying a "potentate" was fomenting conflicts for nationalist interests.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 In retreat Russia accused of war crimes
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/03/they-were-all-shot-russia-accused-of-war-crimes-as-bucha-reveals-horror-of-invasion
GIST	<p>The retreat of Russian forces around Kyiv has left horrifying evidence of atrocities against civilians littered across the region's suburbs and towns, turned into hellish war zones by Vladimir Putin's invasion.</p> <p>As Ukrainian armoured columns rolled into Bucha, a town north-west of the capital, they found streets blocked by burned-out Russian tanks and military vehicles, and strewn with the bodies of civilians whom locals said had been killed by the invading forces without provocation.</p> <p>Photographs from the town showed a scene of devastation, with hunks of charred and destroyed tanks and armoured vehicles lined up along one street, along with dead bodies.</p> <p>Reporters from Agence France-Presse saw at least 20 bodies, all in civilian clothing, strewn across a single street in Bucha, and the body of a missing Ukrainian photographer, Maksim Levin, was discovered in a nearby village.</p> <p>Three of them were tangled up in bicycles after taking their final ride, while others had fallen next to bullet-ridden and crushed cars, AFP reported.</p> <p>One had his hands tied behind his back with a white cloth, and his Ukrainian passport left open beside his corpse, said journalists who accessed the ravaged town.</p> <p>"All these people were shot," Bucha's mayor Anatoly Fedoruk told AFP, adding that 280 other bodies had been buried in mass graves in the town. "These are the consequences of Russian occupation."</p> <p>Ukrainian soldiers in Bucha, who were welcomed warmly by residents of the town, attached cables to the bodies and pulled them off the street for fear they may be booby-trapped.</p> <p>Soldiers also cleared barricades and inspected suspicious objects, placing red rags on remnants of unexploded ordnance to draw attention to the possibility of explosions.</p> <p>As the town was liberated, one woman, Halyna Tovkach, 55, told the Guardian that she was searching for the body of her husband, Oleg, 62. He was killed by Russian soldiers along with their neighbours, two young boys and their mother, as they tried to escape the town on 5 March. "It is a war crime," said Tovkach's son.</p>

Also allegedly among the civilians killed by the Russians was Olha Sukhenko, the head of the village of Motyzhin east of Kyiv, and her entire family.

An in another accusation of war crimes, Russian troops allegedly used children as “human shields” while regrouping.

Ukraine’s attorney general is gathering a dossier of claims about the Russian use of local children to avoid fire when in retreat from around Ukraine’s capital and elsewhere. Coaches of children were said to have been placed in front of tanks in the village of Novyi Bykiv, close to the encircled city of Chernihiv, 100 miles north of Kyiv.

Britain’s foreign secretary, Liz Truss, said she was “appalled by atrocities in Bucha and other towns in Ukraine”.

“Reports of Russian forces targeting innocent civilians are abhorrent. The UK is working with others to collect evidence and support @IntlCrimCourt war crimes investigation. Those responsible will be held to account,” Truss tweeted late on Saturday.

Ukraine and its western allies reported mounting evidence of Russia withdrawing its forces from around Kyiv and building its troop strength in eastern Ukraine. The visible shift did not mean the country faced a reprieve from more than five weeks of war or that the more than 4 million refugees who have fled Ukraine will return soon.

Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, again repeated his warning that Russian troops want to capture the Donbas and the south of Ukraine. In his nightly video address on Saturday, Zelenskiy said “we are aware that the enemy has reserves to increase pressure in the east”.

He nevertheless promised to take the fight to the Russians in the Donbas and as they retreated from the Kyiv region.

“We are strengthening our defences in the eastern direction and in Donbas,” Zelenskiy said. “What is the goal of Russian troops? They want to capture both the Donbas and the south of Ukraine.”

But Zelenskiy complained that the “global security architecture has failed” and that Ukraine has “not yet received enough modern western anti-missile systems” from its western allies, nor given aircraft. He added: “Every Russian missile that hits our cities, and every bomb dropped on our people, on our children, only adds black paint to the history that will describe everyone on whom the decision depended.”

Sources reported a series of explosions in the southern port city of Odesa on Sunday morning.

“Odesa was attacked from the air. Some missiles were shot down by air defense,” the city council said in a brief statement on the Telegram messaging app. It said fires were reported in some areas but gave no indication what was hit in the attack.

Ukraine’s peace negotiator, David Arakhamia, reportedly said that Russia “verbally” accepts the Ukrainian position on peace talks, AFP reported, except for the issue of Crimea. Moscow had also agreed that a referendum on the neutral status of Ukraine “will be the only way out of this situation”.

Arakhamia also told Ukrainian television channels that any meeting between Zelenskiy and the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, would “with a high probability” take place in Turkey.

Elsewhere, Poland’s deputy prime minister has accused France and Germany of being too close to Russia in an interview published on Sunday, as he condemned Berlin’s behaviour towards Moscow before the invasion of Ukraine.

	<p>“Germany, like France, has a strong bias in Moscow’s favour,” Jarosław Kaczyński, who is also leader of the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party, told German daily Die Welt in an interview.</p> <p>Kaczyński saved his strongest words for Berlin, saying that for years the German government did not want to see what Russia was doing under the leadership of Putin “and we see the result today”. He added that “Poland is not pleased with Germany’s role in Europe”.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/01 March jobs report fuels larger Fed rate rise?
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/march-jobs-report-keeps-fed-on-track-for-larger-rate-rise-in-may-11648819176?mod=hp_major_pos3#cxrecs_s
GIST	<p>Friday’s employment figures underscore the urgency Federal Reserve officials feel to quickly withdraw economic stimulus by raising interest rates in potentially larger intervals in the coming months.</p> <p>Employers added 431,000 jobs in March, the Labor Department reported on Friday, and the unemployment rate fell to 3.6% from 3.8% in February. Hiring during the first two months of the year was stronger than initially reported, leaving average monthly hiring at 562,000 jobs so far this year, in line with last year’s booming pace of job gains.</p> <p>The report is likely to do little to assuage concerns expressed recently by Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell that the labor market is overheating, with job and wage growth rising at levels that may keep inflation too far above the central bank’s 2% target.</p> <p>The Fed raised its benchmark short-term rate last month by a quarter percentage point to a range between 0.25% and 0.5%, the first of what officials have indicated could be a series of many rate rises this year. In the two weeks since they last met, many Fed officials have indicated they could support raising rates by a half percentage point instead of the traditional quarter point at their coming meeting, May 3 to May 4.</p> <p>Mr. Powell has indicated that the Fed is also likely to finalize plans at that meeting to start shrinking the central bank’s \$9 trillion asset portfolio.</p> <p>This is the last jobs report before the Fed’s May meeting.</p> <p>Strong demand coupled with shortages for select goods and services one year ago led to a surge in inflation. Fed officials expected it would eventually subside as supply chains healed.</p> <p>But over the last six months, officials have grown more anxious about inflation running above the central bank’s 2% target for much longer than they previously expected—even after any reversal of last year’s extreme price increases for items such as used cars—because of signs that price pressures are broadening to include more labor-intensive services.</p> <p>Fed officials focused heavily last year on promoting a rapid rebound in hiring, and Friday’s report showed that several labor-market indicators, including the number of unemployed workers and the share of 25-to-54-year-olds who have a job, have nearly returned to the levels that prevailed in February 2020, before the coronavirus pandemic froze economic activity.</p> <p>But officials are now concerned that if the pace of hiring and wage growth doesn’t soon slow, inflation could become more difficult to wring out of the economy. Average hourly wages rose 0.4% in March from February and were up 5.6% over the past year, the Labor Department said on Friday.</p> <p>A separate report released Thursday showed that inflation rose 6.4% in February from a year earlier, according to the Fed’s preferred gauge. Core inflation, which excludes food and energy prices, rose 5.4%. Those readings were near their highest in four decades.</p>

	<p>At a press conference on March 16, Mr. Powell signaled greater concern that higher inflation might persist due to a hot job market with record job openings and wages up at their fastest pace in years. “That’s a very, very tight labor market—tight to an unhealthy level, I would say,” he said.</p> <p>In January, the Fed had expected inflation to diminish this year as supply-chain bottlenecks improved, but the war in Ukraine and aggressive sanctions by the West against Moscow have upended those optimistic forecasts by driving up energy and commodity prices and sowing more disruption in the global economy.</p> <p>“That story has already fallen apart,” Mr. Powell said at an economics conference on March 21. “To the extent it continues to fall apart, my colleagues and I may well reach the conclusion we’ll need to move more quickly. And if so, we’ll do so.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	04/02 Bird flu hits poultry flocks, egg prices jump
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/egg-prices-jump-as-bird-flu-hits-poultry-flocks-11648900800?mod=hp_listb_pos2
GIST	<p>A rapidly escalating bird-flu outbreak in the U.S. is contributing to a surge in egg prices and threatens to raise prices on other poultry products in the coming months as deaths continue to mount.</p> <p>Cases of highly pathogenic avian influenza so far have led to the deaths of more than 17 million birds, according to Agriculture Department data. The virus outbreak, the worst in seven years, is hitting Midwest egg-laying flocks and affecting companies from Tyson Foods Inc. to Hormel Foods Corp. More than 11 million egg-laying chickens, roughly 3% of the total U.S. flock, have died or been destroyed as a result of the disease, along with more than two million commercially raised turkeys.</p> <p>Shell egg prices have climbed to \$2.88 a dozen, up about 52% since Feb. 8, when the USDA confirmed the first case in a U.S. commercial turkey flock in Indiana. It is their highest point since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, according to market research firm Urner Barry.</p> <p>Prices are being driven higher by the disease’s spread and the coming Easter holiday, when demand for eggs is high, analysts said. Industry officials aren’t expecting any shortages, but analysts said retailers are buying up eggs in anticipation that supplies could tighten in the coming weeks.</p> <p>“Egg availability heading into Easter is sure to be hampered,” said Brian Earnest, an animal protein economist at CoBank. The U.S. supply of table egg-laying chickens is down from more than 340 million in April 2019 to about 322 million in February, he estimated.</p> <p>As a result, companies like Cal-Maine Inc., the largest U.S. egg producer by sales, are poised to see higher egg prices for the rest of the year as a result of the tighter market, said analysts at Stephens Inc. Cal-Maine said Wednesday that it hasn’t had any cases at company-owned or contracted production facilities to date.</p> <p>“We are also working closely with egg industry associations and government officials to mitigate the risk of future outbreaks and effectively manage our response,” said Dolph Baker, Cal-Maine’s chief executive.</p> <p>The price of turkey breasts, already at its highest levels since the last major avian influenza outbreak in 2015, has held around \$4.45 a pound over the past few weeks, according to Urner Barry. With turkey supplies already tight and demand likely to grow in the summer months, further flock losses could push prices higher, said Russ Whitman, senior vice president at the firm.</p> <p>Dozens of bird-flu cases have been reported across the U.S. in the past two months, with cases ranging from Maryland to South Dakota. The disease was confirmed by the USDA in five new U.S. states Wednesday.</p> <p>The disease also was confirmed in several commercial turkey farms in Minnesota that supply Hormel’s Jennie-O Turkey Store brand, affecting more than 300,000 turkeys, the company said. Perdue Farms Inc.</p>

said it received confirmation in late February of bird flu in two of its Indiana turkey flocks. Tyson said there was an outbreak in a flock of about 240,000 birds at a commercial farm in Fulton County, Ky., that housed the company's chickens.

The bird-flu outbreak comes as food prices are already on the rise, with food makers paying more for fuel, ingredients and labor. Analysts said it can be difficult to pinpoint how much prices of certain protein products have been affected by the bird flu because of other inflationary pressures. The war between two grain-producing powers, Russia and Ukraine, is further inflating meat prices as producers rely heavily on grain to feed livestock and poultry.

The U.S. poultry industry had remained largely unaffected by avian influenza since the 2015 outbreak that led to the deaths of more than 50 million chickens and turkeys, the largest ever recorded in the U.S. Since then, chicken, turkey and egg processors invested in new biosecurity measures and other precautions. Officials said the increased measures give them confidence they can mitigate the spread, but this year's outbreak has been hard to predict.

The USDA has been working with the poultry industry and individual states on surveillance and communicating proper farm safety measures since then, said Rosemary Sifford, chief veterinary officer at the USDA. The department said it compensates farm owners for fair market value of any animals euthanized and other costs associated with controlling the virus.

Safety measures include not sharing equipment between farms and keeping it disinfected, and workers showering and donning clean clothing and boots before interacting with a flock, she said. Farmers also need to secure their barns from wild birds that could be carrying the virus: A breakthrough at a commercial farm could be as simple as a worker stepping on wild bird fecal matter outside of the barn and forgetting to clean their boots before entering, experts said.

Trey Braswell, a fourth-generation farmer in Nashville, N.C., said he has limited visitors to his farm, disinfects all vehicles and requires any outside vehicles coming in to go through a carwash. His 1.7 million layer chickens haven't been affected so far.

"There is no foolproof system," he said. "Egg farmers are working around the clock."

Farmers, industry groups and the USDA have held weekly calls about managing the bird flu's impact, said Emily Metz, CEO of the American Egg Board, which represents egg producers. Shortages are still a long way off, she said. Egg producers have in some cases shifted orders around to avoid missed deliveries to customers, she said.

"If one producer is affected in a certain region, they are calling around neighbors to see if they can make sure the order is met," she said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/02 Health experts: polio eradication threatened
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-war-and-other-crises-threaten-polio-eradication-health-experts-say-11648900800?mod=hp_list_pos5
GIST	<p>Russia's invasion of Ukraine and other global crises are threatening to set back a costly, decadeslong push to eradicate polio, health experts say.</p> <p>In Ukraine, where a polio outbreak was detected in the fall, health authorities were forced to halt a nationwide vaccination campaign after the war began in late February. They worry now that deteriorating conditions could give polio and other infectious diseases a chance to flourish.</p> <p>At the same time, a case of polio in Malawi is jeopardizing an important milestone in Africa. The World Health Organization declared in 2020 that the virus had been eliminated there.</p>

These flare-ups, along with other difficulties brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, are raising new hurdles to global health leaders' latest goal of stopping polio cases by the end of 2023.

While there has been major progress in beating back polio over the past year in places that have long been holdouts, the virus has reappeared in countries where authorities hoped they had conquered it.

"We are at the brink of eradication," said Zulfiqar Bhutta, founding director of the Institute for Global Health and Development at the Aga Khan University in Karachi, Pakistan. "I am very keen to see the end of polio, which I think is quite in jeopardy, unfortunately, because of what is happening in various areas, including Ukraine."

Health authorities are concerned because vaccination rates against polio are low in parts of Ukraine and some surrounding countries—below 50% in some regions of Ukraine in 2021, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A four-month pause in vaccination campaigns in 2020 in Ukraine due to the Covid-19 pandemic likely helped lead to the polio cases, according to the CDC.

The outbreak in Ukraine is a setback, but doesn't endanger the global eradication goal, said Jose Hagan, team lead in the vaccine-preventable disease and immunizations program at the WHO's Regional Office for Europe. The WHO is working with the Ukrainian government and local healthcare providers to maintain routine vaccination services for polio and other diseases in areas away from the centers of conflict, he said.

WHO and Unicef teams are also conducting more disease surveillance, looking more intensively for children who may have been infected with polio and paralyzed, and for evidence of the virus spreading in communities, said Melissa Corkum, a senior program specialist in polio at Unicef. "Where you have a sudden emergency, a war and large scale population mobility into multiple countries where there are gaps in population immunity, that is a huge concern," she said.

Polio is a highly infectious virus, transmitted mostly through feces, that infects primarily young children. Most develop few or no symptoms, but the virus can infect the brain or spinal cord, causing paralysis and sometimes death.

Because the goal is to eradicate polio, any new case is important, said Ms. Corkum. "One case is a public health emergency in any country."

Two forms of the virus currently cause outbreaks, and there is no difference in the illness they cause, according to the CDC. Wild poliovirus—the source of the case in Malawi—is found in nature. The outbreak in Ukraine is caused by vaccine-derived poliovirus, a mutated form of a strain used in an oral polio vaccine.

That oral vaccine relies on a weakened, live virus that inoculated children then shed in feces. In places that lack adequate sanitation, the weakened virus sometimes mutates to resemble a wild virus and infects children who are not fully immunized.

Medical experts hoped that 2020 would be the last year for wild polio cases, after decades of mass-vaccination drives wiped it out in most of the world. Just two countries—Afghanistan and Pakistan—have never eliminated it, and they are close. Five cases were detected in the two countries in 2021, and only one case has been found in Afghanistan this year, according to data from the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, or GPEI, a partnership of six organizations leading the eradication push.

But a door-to-door vaccination campaign launched last fall in Afghanistan was halted in two provinces in late February after eight polio workers were killed. The campaign aims to reach three million children who are in previously inaccessible areas now opened up to health workers by the Taliban, said Carol Pandak, director of the PolioPlus program at Rotary International, a humanitarian service organization and GPEI partner.

Last year's conflict also led to major disruptions to health services and an exodus of health workers in the country, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in late March.

Immunization officials launched a campaign last month to vaccinate 23 million children in Africa after a 3-year-old girl was infected with wild polio and paralyzed in Malawi. It was the first wild polio case in the country in three decades; the virus was imported from Pakistan, according to a genetic analysis.

Vaccine-derived polio has become a major battle over the past four years, causing outbreaks in more than 40 countries since 2018, among populations with low polio vaccination rates, according to GPEI data.

There were fewer outbreaks in 2021 than 2020, and a new oral polio vaccine to target the vaccine-derived virus is helping to prevent new cases. Clinical trials have shown that the weakened virus in the new vaccine is significantly less likely to mutate and become harmful, the GPEI has said.

Still, the pandemic and other obstacles are making it harder to stop the virus. Covid-19 vaccines are given priority for distribution, and less cargo space is available for polio vaccines, according to Ms. Corkum. "It has changed the speed of our response," she said.

In Ukraine, health authorities began inoculating children under age 6 against vaccine-derived polio in February, after a 17-month-old girl and a 2-year-old boy in the western part of the country were infected and paralyzed. Nineteen other children who had been in contact with the young girl tested positive but didn't develop symptoms.

The Russian invasion forced them to stop just over three weeks later. The interruption leaves approximately 100,000 children susceptible to polio, and the number of children missing immunizations against polio and other diseases is growing as the war stretches on, according to Dr. Hagan of the WHO's Regional Office for Europe.

"The bottom line is war and polio eradication don't go together," Dr. Bhutta said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/02 Russia threat draws new NATO front line
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/on-natos-front-line-russias-threat-draws-new-allied-forces-11648904581?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos5
GIST	<p>MIHAIL KOGĂLNICEANU, Romania—Until recently, the military base here near the Black Sea was little more than a stopover. Now it is at the front line of NATO's defense against Russia.</p> <p>U.S. troops have for years used the aging compound's airstrip as a transit point for supplying operations in Afghanistan, but in recent weeks American and allied militaries have deployed more than 1,800 personnel, hundreds of vehicles and other military equipment to the wind-swept fields.</p> <p>They are here because one of the cornerstones of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization states that an attack on one of its 30 members represents an attack on all. Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February, fears have increased that the conflict could spread beyond Ukraine's borders.</p> <p>"We're here to send a message to Russia: Don't set one foot across the border," said Col. Vincent Minguet, the commander of a new NATO force that includes about 500 French and 300 Belgian troops.</p> <p>The Mihail Kogălniceanu base is now part of a new front line for NATO in Romania, which shares a 400-mile-long border with Ukraine. The troops are part of four new battle groups recently deployed by NATO in Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia. They are there to complement the forces that NATO sent to Poland and the Baltic countries after Russia seized Crimea from Ukraine in 2014.</p>

The battle groups' mission is to reinforce NATO's eastern defenses and deter Russian aggression. Romania, Hungary and Slovakia share a land border with Ukraine, while Bulgaria has access to the Black Sea.

"President Putin's invasion of Ukraine has changed our security environment for the long term," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said last month after an extraordinary summit of national leaders in Brussels. "It is a new normal and NATO is responding."

Russia's invasion has prompted the alliance to place an unprecedented number of troops, planes and vehicles on alert. The alliance has deployed 40,000 troops on its eastern flank, along with significant air and naval assets. Mr. Stoltenberg has noted that Russian President Vladimir Putin has said he wants NATO pushed back from its eastern positions, but the invasion has instead brought a greater number of alliance troops to his doorstep.

French President Emmanuel Macron, who in 2019 declared NATO was experiencing a "brain death," has said the alliance has been jolted back into life. "I think NATO just received an electric shock," Mr. Macron said at the summit in Brussels last month.

The Mihail Kogălniceanu base is evidence of that. Every day, helicopters and jet fighters fly overhead and tanks roll across empty fields as part of regular military exercises.

The base is now home to about 3,000 soldiers, including around 1,900 Americans, some of whom have recently been deployed from Germany. The base includes a post office, a theater and stores. "It's a city," said Marcus Fichtl, a U.S. Army spokesman who is currently based in Romania.

More soldiers are expected to arrive in the coming months, according to U.S. and French officials.

Last week, NATO started deploying troops in other parts of Romania as part of large-scale military exercises, said Col. Minguet. Eventually, some troops could be stationed in other military bases across the country, he added.

In the nearby town of Mihail Kogălniceanu, locals are divided over the soldiers' arrival. For many, Russia has long been a very distant threat. But its invasion of neighboring Ukraine has raised fears of an imminent attack on Romanian soil.

Ramona Codrin, who owns a local grocery store, said she welcomes NATO's protection. "If the base wasn't here, the danger would be bigger," she said.

But others disagree. Vasile Diaconescu, a 28-year-old delivery man, said the new military presence adds fuel to the fire. "We are a target now," he said. "Why do they come here to disturb us?"

In March, a French soldier was about to get in his car and drive to the ski slopes in the Alps when he received an urgent message. He had recently returned from Africa's Sahel region, where French-led troops have spent nearly a decade battling Islamist terrorist groups, and have started to withdraw. There would be no skiing this year as he was needed in Romania.

"We're here to stay," he said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/02 Russia Ukraine war threatens China trade
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-bet-on-sending-its-exports-through-russia-hits-setback-11648908000?mod=hp_lista_pos3
GIST	Sanctions imposed on Russia are disrupting China's ambitions to move more exports to Europe, a setback for the \$4 trillion effort championed by Chinese leader Xi Jinping to cement his country as the world's pre-eminent trading partner.

Although the European Union has yet to officially ban imports passing through Russia, inbound rail-cargo shipments have all but frozen, according to freight forwarders. Moving shipping containers from China along a 7,500-mile corridor that runs through Russia and extends to the United Kingdom is a vital part of Belt and Road, a yearslong undertaking that includes investments to connect China to Europe by land and sea.

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, some freight forwarders that move Chinese goods are looking to Kazakhstan and Georgia for rail-cargo shipments.

"Many customers from Europe and China have reoriented their shipments from rail to ships," said Andreea Brinza, vice president of the Romanian Institute for the Study of the Asia-Pacific, a think tank. "The situation is very fluid, so there are risks regarding rail shipping, and things can change quickly for the worse."

The principal rail links along what is known as the Silk Road rail corridor to Europe from Russia pass through Belarus and Poland. The port of St. Petersburg in western Russia is another link, with trains moving Chinese cargo through Siberia before the goods are placed on container vessels destined for Europe.

China's Belt and Road initiative was announced by Mr. Xi in 2013, and Beijing has since signed deals to move its exports with 140 countries. The investments mainly involve long-term port leases, along with developing rail and road networks and power stations.

China's trade with those countries reached \$1.83 trillion last year, a 24% increase from the year earlier, according to the Chinese Commerce Ministry.

Big shipping and logistics players like A.P. Moeller-Maersk A/S, Hapag-Lloyd AG and freight forwarder DB Schenker have suspended operations to and from Russia. The inland port of Duisburg in Germany, a Silk Road hub, warned in March that marine insurers would likely stop covering shipments from Belarus and Russia.

The rail network gained favor with cargo owners and freight forwarders during the Covid-19 pandemic as an alternative to ocean transport because ports around the world closed or curtailed operations to stop the spread of the virus. Scores of laden ships got stuck for weeks outside Chinese, European and American ports causing delivery delays that stretched for months.

Overall, logistics players moved around \$82 billion worth of Chinese exports into the EU by rail in 2021, a 10-fold increase since 2016, according to EU and Chinese customs data. That is about 10% of the total \$828 billion annual trade between China and Europe, where most of the cargo is moved by ships.

"It's faster and costs less to send Chinese exports to Europe on trains, but now very little is moving," said George Xiradakis, managing director of Athens-based XRTC Business Consultants and an adviser to China Development Bank. "It's a painful setback for the Belt and Road initiative."

At the port of Duisburg, often a first stop in Europe for locomotives with Chinese exports, dozens of trains arrive weekly stuffed with clothes, sports equipment and electronics from manufacturing centers in Wuhan and Chongqing. On their way back East, the trains move German cars, French wine, Scotch whisky, as well as high-end clothing and accessories from Milan.

"Trains are still coming with cargo that left before or during the Russian attack. But over the next few weeks, we expect less," a spokesman at the port said this week "There will be a negative impact."

The Ukraine war could also shift some sentiment on projects in Europe aimed at helping Chinese cargo move about the continent. Germany's port of Duisburg said it would stop all business activity in Belarus and plans to sell its 39% stake in the Eurasian Rail Gateway Co., which planned to build a container

terminal at a logistics complex outside Minsk. China has invested around \$2 billion since 2015 in the complex called the Great Stone Industrial Park, near Minsk.

The invasion put Chinese companies with a global reach in an awkward position, as they have to abide by sanctions by cutting off or scaling back business ties with Russia even though Beijing said it won't take part in the U.S.-led sanctions.

Export volume shipped on trains from China's Dalian port to Europe has sharply reduced since March as shipping demand and willingness decreased, according to an official with Dalian Port Company Ltd. cited by the state-run Securities Times. Before the Ukraine war, the shipments delivered on China-Europe freight trains from Dalian rose 69% on year in the January-February period, according to data released earlier by Dalian Port, the port operator.

Shandong Yuma Sun-Shading Technology Corp. Ltd. said at the end of March that the company's exports to Ukraine, Russia and other neighboring countries were reduced last month because of the fighting in Ukraine and logistics bottlenecks. The listed firm, which manufactures and sells roller blinds, drapes and curtains, said product deliveries to those countries slowed significantly in March, but it expects business to be back to normal after the war ends.

To boost Russia's reach in global trade, President Vladimir Putin in 2018 ordered state monopoly Russian Railways to substantially grow container traffic. Moscow expects container flows to increase to 3.6 million boxes by 2035, which if achieved, would boost Russia's capacity share in overall Asia-to-Europe cargo movement to 15% from around 5% currently.

If Russia is completely taken out of the train routes that move cargo from China, then containers would have to travel longer distances through the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus region and enter Europe through Romania or Bulgaria. The rerouting would likely result in higher costs and more complicated logistics that could substantially cut train volumes, industry participants say.

FourKites, a Chicago-based maritime data provider that tracks container shipments, said that if the volume transported by rail was transferred to ships, it would mean an increase in sea freight volume by up to 8%.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/02 US, Philippines engage large military drill
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-philippines-hold-one-of-their-largest-ever-military-exercises-11648906324?mod=hp_list_pos4
GIST	<p>SINGAPORE—The U.S. and Philippines are holding one of their largest-ever military exercises involving thousands of troops on both sides, a sign that their security alliance is on firmer footing following years of turbulence that threatened to unravel a key U.S. relationship in the Indo-Pacific region.</p> <p>The shift has been under way for the past year as Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte approaches the end of his six-year term. During much of his tenure, Mr. Duterte bristled at Washington's admonishments of his human-rights record and drew his country closer to China. The U.S. alliance appeared particularly vulnerable when Manila in 2020 moved to scrap a military pact that facilitates visits to the Philippines by U.S. troops, ships and aircraft.</p> <p>Since July, top officials on both sides have worked to calm the storm. In high-level discussions in Manila and Washington, D.C., the Biden administration leaned in to its goal of strengthening U.S. alliances, while American donations of Covid-19 vaccines to the Philippines also won Mr. Duterte's goodwill. On a trip by U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin to Manila last summer, the Philippines said it would keep the military pact, called the Visiting Forces Agreement.</p> <p>The agreement aids large-scale military exercises such as the one that began this week, called Balikatan, with 8,900 U.S. and Philippine military personnel. It involves scenarios in which the Philippines is attacked or occupied by another country and U.S. forces arrive to defend their treaty ally, said Col. Ramon</p>

Zagala, spokesman for the Philippines military. The two countries have mutual defense obligations under a 1951 treaty.

The Philippines faces an assertive and better-equipped China in the South China Sea, where the two countries have overlapping territorial and maritime claims. While seeking closer ties with Beijing, Manila has also on a number of occasions protested the actions of Chinese navy, coast guard and maritime militia forces in waters it considers its own. In 2012, China seized an outcrop called Scarborough Shoal from the Philippines.

Training with U.S. forces is especially critical as the Philippines' decadeslong communist insurgency draws down, allowing its armed forces to focus on external threats, said Col. Zagala. The exercises feature amphibious operations to practice beach landings of U.S. troops, air assault using helicopters, combined arms fire and maritime security drills designed to secure supply ships that might be vulnerable to attack, Col. Zagala said.

The U.S. says the drills are an opportunity to work toward a free and open Indo-Pacific. "The exercise features planning, operations, exchanges and activities that increase both our nations' military capabilities to provide for the mutual defense of the Philippine archipelago," Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said this week.

The recent momentum in ties has helped invigorate another pact that slowed down after Mr. Duterte took office—one that provides for the U.S. to build or improve infrastructure on Philippine military bases for use by both militaries. The 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement is on track, Col. Zagala said, with new facilities for military training and humanitarian assistance operations in the works.

"We are really going full blast on our agreements with the United States," Jose Manuel Romualdez, Philippines' ambassador to the U.S., said in an interview. "I think that we're in a better place now."

The Philippines will vote for a new president on May 9. Foreign-policy questions haven't featured prominently in the election campaigns, including that of front-runner Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the son of the country's former dictator. Mr. Duterte is limited by the Philippine constitution to a single six-year term.

Since taking office in 2016, Mr. Duterte has expressed distrust of Washington. He objected to U.S. pressure over human-rights issues, such as his bloody war on drugs and the detention of Philippine Sen. Leila de Lima, a former justice secretary and critic of Mr. Duterte who has been in jail for more than five years on drug-related charges that human-rights groups say are politically motivated. Mr. Romualdez, who has faced sharp questions on these issues from lawmakers in Washington, says legal cases must be left to the Philippines' justice system.

Mr. Romualdez said recent discussion between the U.S. and Philippines had helped the two sides reach a clearer understanding of where they stand on many of the issues confronting the alliance. At the same time, navigating U.S.-China tensions remains a tightrope walk for the Philippines, which is close to the U.S. but also seeks to cultivate economic ties with Beijing, he said.

The U.S.-Philippine alliance has long been in need of upkeep as China's rise reshapes the region. The Trump administration took a step forward in 2019 by clarifying that the U.S.'s mutual defense obligations under the 1951 treaty would kick in if Philippine forces, aircraft or public vessels came under armed attack in the South China Sea. For years before that, as China built and militarized islands in the South China Sea, the lack of an explicit U.S. assurance sowed distrust of Washington in Manila that has proved hard to shake.

Experts say the extent of the Philippines' obligations under the treaty also need greater clarity. For instance, it is uncertain if Philippine bases would be open for use by the U.S. military in the event that China attacks Taiwan and American forces are drawn in, said Jay Batongbacal, professor at the University of the Philippines who teaches the law of the sea. The Philippine archipelago, which lies to the south of

	Taiwan, is closer to the island than Japan and Guam. “That’s what makes the Philippines important and strategic,” said Mr. Batongbacal.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 Shanghai Covid rules separate kids, parents
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/in-shanghai-strict-covid-rules-separate-children-from-parents-11648961849?mod=hp_lista_pos1
GIST	<p>As a viral video ricocheted around China’s internet, showing toddlers and infants in a Shanghai medical facility, crying as they were crammed in threes and fours on metal-barred beds, one 39-year-old mother was particularly distraught.</p> <p>“I searched for any sight of my daughter in the video but couldn’t find her,” said the mother, who asked to be identified only by her surname, Zhu.</p> <p>Ms. Zhu said she had been separated from her 2½-year-old daughter on Tuesday after they tested positive for Covid in Shanghai, home of what is quickly becoming China’s biggest coronavirus outbreak in more than two years.</p> <p>In the following days, Ms. Zhu said she was left with virtually no news or photos of her daughter, who she said was sent to a separate facility for Covid-infected children and infants.</p> <p>After seeing the video, she said she couldn’t sleep, overcome with worry about her daughter.</p> <p>Social-media users who uploaded the widely circulated footage of the children described it as coming from a facility in Shanghai’s southwestern Jinshan district designated for Covid-infected children.</p> <p>The hospital it purported to show, the Shanghai Public Health Clinical Center, said in a statement on Saturday that some photos and videos circulating online captured scenes of the hospital’s pediatric ward in the midst of a transfer to another building, prompted by an increase in infected children in recent days, suggesting that the situation was temporary.</p> <p>The hospital also said in the statement that the children were being treated and cared for and that it was seeking to improve communication with parents.</p> <p>A hospital representative said the hospital declined to comment beyond the statement.</p> <p>The Shanghai woman who originally posted the footage online, who described herself as the mother of a 6-year-old boy at the Jinshan facility, later removed the video from her account. Earlier posts on her account had described the video as having been sent to her by a volunteer at the hospital. She didn’t reply to requests for comment made through her social-media account. Her name couldn’t be determined.</p> <p>On Saturday, Zeng Qun, deputy head of the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau, said at a press conference that some children have been temporarily separated from parents who have been infected or barred from returning home due to lockdowns. Mr. Zeng called this a “gut-wrenching problem” and urged authorities to help address the situation swiftly.</p> <p>Shanghai, a megacity of more than 25 million people, has been locked down in a two-phase quarantine that began last week. On Sunday, the city added a daily record of more than 8,200 new locally transmitted infections for the previous day, bringing the total cases to more than 50,000 since March 1.</p> <p>Public frustration aimed at Shanghai’s crushing Covid controls has been mounting online as lockdowns in some parts of the city approach the one-month mark. Some residents have been denied basic medical care as the city’s healthcare system is stretched to the limits.</p>

Though no Covid deaths have yet been officially reported in the city, at least two elder-care facilities in Shanghai have suffered surges in Covid cases in recent weeks, leading to multiple deaths, The Wall Street Journal has reported.

One mother in Shanghai who also only wanted to be identified by her surname, Zhang, said in an interview that her 2-year-old boy was taken away from her on Monday after the child and both parents tested positive for Covid-19. Since her son was sent to the facility in Jinshan, Ms. Zhang, who is being treated at another hospital, said she has received only one phone call, to ask about his medical history, from the doctors in Jinshan.

The hospital representative declined to comment on individual cases, referring to the hospital's statement.

Ms. Zhang said the next time she saw her 2-year-old was when the video went viral on China's internet.

"It was only two seconds but I recognized him immediately," Ms. Zhang said.

She said she has been in touch with other mothers whose children are at the same facility.

"It's not just about us. Infants being covered under blankets in the footage was so hard to watch. I can't bear to listen to their crying," said Ms. Zhang, a native of the inland province of Anhui.

For her part, Ms. Zhu said she and her daughter, who live in the western half of Shanghai, which entered lockdown on Friday, tested positive for Covid on March 26 and were accepted for treatment the same day at Shanghai Tongren Hospital.

In the early hours of March 29, Ms. Zhu said, a doctor there sent her a message asking if she would be willing to send her daughter to a separate facility for infected children in Jinshan district.

"I rejected them immediately," Ms. Zhu said in a phone interview.

Hours later, Ms. Zhu said, Tongren Hospital staff called to say they would move her to a separate quarantine center for adults. After speaking to her husband, Ms. Zhu said she reluctantly agreed to have their daughter transferred to the Jinshan facility.

Over the next four days, she said, the hospital staff at Jinshan didn't offer any updates about her daughter, though they did answer roughly one out of every four or five questions she sent them.

"I can't take it any more. I beg you, please give my daughter back to me," she wrote to a doctor at the Jinshan facility on the messaging app WeChat early Saturday. According to screenshots of the exchange reviewed by the Journal, the doctor told her they had no choice but to comply with healthcare regulations.

The hospital representative declined to comment on individual cases, referring to the statement the hospital had put out. Attempts to reach the doctor were unsuccessful.

Ms. Zhu said she was worried about the psychological impact on her daughter, who has never been separated from her family for so long.

Just before noon on Saturday, she said she received a video from the hospital: It was her daughter, the first glimpse she had received in four days. In the video, a doctor standing by her daughter's bed told her to smile. A nurse asked her daughter if she treated her well and told her to nod if so.

"My heart aches seeing this. My daughter's facial expression was very stiff. She looked very confused and unnatural," said Ms. Zhu, who still doesn't know when she will have a chance to see her daughter again.

As for Ms. Zhang, whose husband is being treated at a different facility in Shanghai, her only wish is for the family to be together again soon.

	“The virus is not scary at this point,” said Ms. Zhang, who is suffering only mild symptoms. “Separation from my loved ones scares me more than anything else.”
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/02 Seeking recession clues in yield curve
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/economists-seek-recession-clues-in-the-yield-curve-11648891802?mod=hp_lead_pos10
GIST	<p>As yields on two-year Treasury notes this week moved above yields on 10-year notes, Wall Street analysts sent up warning flares.</p> <p>Economists—like ancient soothsayers divining the future—track how interest rates of different maturities vary for signals about the outlook for growth.</p> <p>When short-term interest rates are higher than long-term interest rates, a phenomenon Wall Street mavens call an inverted yield curve, it is sometimes a signal of recession.</p> <p>That’s what had the soothsayers worried.</p> <p>The closely watched differential between yields on two-year and 10-year Treasury notes inverted this week. On Friday, the yield on two-year Treasury notes hit 2.44% and on 10-year notes it lagged behind at 2.38%.</p> <p>Steve Englander, an investment strategist at Standard Chartered Bank, saw similar signals coming out of eurodollar futures markets, where traders make bets on future rates. He found that expected short-term rates in three years and four years were lower than expected rates in two years.</p> <p>“This is typically a sign that bad times are ahead, a recession or at least a slump is expected,” he said. “The market seems convinced this is going to end in tears.”</p> <p>In normal times, the longer it takes to pay back a loan, the higher the interest rate you have to pay. Lending money over a longer duration entails more risk and thus demands a higher return.</p> <p>The interest rate for a three-month loan, in other words, should be less than the interest rate for a two-year loan, which should be less than on a 10-year loan. When these relationships invert, it’s a signal of turbulence on the horizon that often involves the Federal Reserve.</p> <p>In the early and late 1980s, before recessions, yield curves inverted. It happened again in the early 2000s and mid-2000s before recessions.</p> <p>The logic goes like this: Investors expect the Fed to push up interest rates so much in the short run to fight off inflation that it ends up squeezing credit, causing a recession and having to reverse those rate increases further down the road.</p> <p>The high short-run interest rate is driven by expectations of Fed interest-rate increases and the long-run rate is driven by expectations of recession, a subsequent drop in inflation and Fed rate cuts later on.</p> <p>Beyond these signals, inverted yield curves can cause practical problems. Banks typically borrow money in the short term and lend it in the long term. When short-term rates are higher than long-term rates, banks face profit pressures and disincentives to lend, which also curtail economic activity.</p> <p>Wall Street inboxes were thus stuffed this week with notes like Mr. Englander’s, titled, “Inverted rates as a flashing yellow to the Fed.”</p>

Sometimes a yield-curve inversion and recession is the necessary price to bring down high inflation, as happened in the early 1980s when then-Fed Chairman Paul Volcker used high interest rates to tame double-digit inflation.

At other times, the Fed perhaps goes too far. In 2006, the central bank pushed its benchmark short-term rate above 5% while long-term interest rates remained anchored below that level. The low long-term rate might have been a sign that the market expected subdued inflation, and rate increases weren't needed. A financial crisis and recession followed in 2007 and 2008.

Because of this history, Fed officials care deeply about signals the yield curve sends.

In some cases the Fed has reversed course during cycles of interest-rate increases and averted recession, as in 1998. It also reversed course in 2019, and might have averted recession had the Covid-19 pandemic not occurred.

Right now, the Fed officials say they have time before such concerns become relevant.

Yield curves can be measured using interest rates across a wide spectrum of maturities, from overnight to 30 years, and some inversions matter more than others. Though investors often look at differences between yields on two-year and 10-year Treasury notes, Fed researchers Eric Engstrom and Steven Sharpe concluded those weren't the rates that actually mattered.

They found the relationship of rates over shorter horizons of less than two years was a more accurate measure of the risk of recession. They compare current three-month Treasury-bill rates to market expectations for three-month rates 18 months in the future. Using that approach, recession alarms aren't ringing. Short-term rates are much lower than expected rates 18 months from now.

"There is no need to fear the 2-10 spread," Messrs. Engstrom and Sharpe argued in a recent paper.

Fed Chairman Jerome Powell seemed to endorse the view in comments to the National Association for Business Economics in March. Like Mr. Engstrom and Mr. Sharpe, he said, "I tend to look at the shorter part of the yield curve."

What is an investor to make of this soothsaying?

Taken all together, the yield-curve signals seem to be saying that the Fed has room and time to raise short-term interest rates from their rock-bottom levels in the months ahead.

The central bank hopes that inflation will come down along the way as supply bottlenecks in the economy ease. If inflation doesn't recede as hoped and the central bank presses forward with rate increases further into 2023 or beyond, then recession might become more of a threat than it is now.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/02 Renewed interest in labor movement
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/amazon-workers-union-victory-bolsters-revitalized-labor-movement-11648904400?mod=hp_lead_pos5
GIST	<p>The union victory at an Amazon.com Inc. warehouse in New York City is the latest example of renewed interest in labor activism among U.S. workers. It could prompt workers at other Amazon facilities and elsewhere to follow suit, efforts that organizers hope will reverse a long decline in union membership.</p> <p>The Covid-19 pandemic brought attention to the critical role that workers such as warehouse employees, cashiers and drivers play in the functioning of the U.S. economy, often for relatively low pay. At the same time, labor shortages have meant that many workers are in a better position to bargain for increased pay and benefits.</p>

That has prompted employees in lower-paid service jobs, who haven't been heavily unionized in the past, to take action. Since last year workers at roughly 150 Starbucks Corp. stores have petitioned to hold union votes, and several have voted to unionize. Workers at a Recreational Equipment Inc., or REI, store in Manhattan voted to unionize in March.

Manufacturing workers at Kellogg Co., Deere & Co. and Volvo went on strike last year for higher pay. Nurses and other healthcare workers have held protests or quit their jobs, saying the demands of the pandemic have made their jobs unsustainable. Elsewhere, restaurant workers, teachers, university instructors, grocery workers and others have staged walkouts and strikes.

Amazon experienced bouts of labor unrest even before this past week's election. Workers at two distribution centers in Illinois walked off the job in December, as have workers in the past at sites that include facilities in Minneapolis and New York.

A separate union election at an Amazon warehouse in Alabama was close enough Thursday to require a hearing by the National Labor Relations Board. Workers at another New York City Amazon warehouse are set to vote on a union later this month.

"In many industries we saw people say, 'OK, I'm going to quit,' but low-wage workers, warehouse workers don't have that option," prompting them to organize, said Kate Bronfenbrenner, a senior lecturer at Cornell University who studies labor organizing.

A Gallup survey last year found that 68% of Americans approved of labor unions, more than at any other time since 1965.

President Biden has made no secret of his support for labor unions, saying he wants to be known as the "most pro-union president" in history. The Labor Department has made regulatory moves seen as beneficial to unions.

So far, however, these efforts haven't shown up in union-membership data. Roughly 6.1% of private-sector workers were union members last year, down from 6.3% in 2020 and 16.8% in 1983, according to the Labor Department. Labor Department data show there were 16 strikes involving at least 1,000 people in 2021, roughly on par with the average for recent years.

Glenn Spencer, senior vice president at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, said it was too early to say whether the recent interest in labor unions would have a long-term effect.

"There's been a lot of hype around it, but I don't know that this is an indicator that there's this large number of workers suddenly interested in unions this year," he said.

The long-term decline in union membership partly reflects slower employment growth in industries that have traditionally been heavily unionized, such as manufacturing or construction. Companies have also opened more plants in Southern states where unions are rare.

Ms. Bronfenbrenner said the union victory at the Amazon warehouse in New York City's Staten Island is an indication that union campaigns can be successful, even against the country's second-largest private employer.

"Workers everywhere and the general public everywhere saw Amazon as the unorganizable," she said. "This just explodes that and says that no company is invincible."

Researchers have found that workers want to join unions but don't because they are afraid, she said, a phenomenon known as the representation gap.

"That's what employers depend on," she said. "They depend on workers feeling it can't be done, and that fear, that sense of hopelessness is what keeps workers from trying."

	<p>Labor experts said it was significant that the campaign to unionize Amazon’s Staten Island warehouse was run by an independent group of local workers, rather than national union officials brought on to help with organizing.</p> <p>That could prompt the country’s unions to work more closely with local communities, said Tamara Lee, a professor at Rutgers University School of Management and Labor Relations.</p> <p>“I think this is a moment where the labor movement is expanding in terms of what social justice means to them and their members, and that’s going to change the strategy and how they organize,” she said.</p> <p>Even workers who haven’t taken part in union drives, strikes or walkouts have found ways to exercise their newfound power. Employees have been demanding and getting wage increases or leaving jobs for better-paying ones. Private-sector average hourly earnings rose 5.6% in March over the previous year, well above the pace before the pandemic. For leisure and hospitality, a high-demand industry, they increased 11.8%.</p> <p>The share of workers who quit their jobs has hit record levels in recent months. The number of new hires as a share of the workforce is also higher than it was before the pandemic, suggesting that people are switching jobs at a brisk pace.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 China backs off economic policy initiative
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/xi-jinpings-common-prosperity-was-everywhere-but-china-backed-off-11648978380?mod=hp_lead_pos2
GIST	<p>HONG KONG—China’s apparent retreat from one of its most important policy initiatives is showing how hard it is to remake the country’s economy and reduce inequality nearly a decade into Xi Jinping’s rule.</p> <p>For most of last year, Mr. Xi trumpeted a signature program known as “common prosperity” aimed at redistributing more of China’s wealth, amid concerns that elites had benefited disproportionately from the country’s economic boom. The program underpinned many of Mr. Xi’s policy drives, including a clampdown on technology companies that were seen as exploiting their market power to boost profits.</p> <p>But while some aspects of the tech crackdown continue, other parts of the program have fizzled, as China shifts its priorities toward shoring up slowing growth.</p> <p>Last year, the phrase “common prosperity” seemed to be everywhere, in state media, schools, and speeches by Mr. Xi and others. A historic resolution passed during Communist Party meetings in the fall, which puts him on equal footing with Mao Zedong, used the phrase eight times.</p> <p>This year, it turned up just once in a 17,000-word government work report on the economy delivered by Premier Li Keqiang in March.</p> <p>The Finance Ministry’s latest budget report didn’t spell out specific targets for the central government to allocate resources to the campaign. In Zhejiang province, which was designated as the primary testing ground for the program, new economic plans make little mention of policies that could put more money in the pockets of less affluent households.</p> <p>Beijing has walked back some measures related to the campaign. The government last month shelved plans to expand a new property tax that could have funded social-welfare programs but faced opposition from elites and policy makers who worried it would push property values lower. Trial runs of the tax currently apply only to Shanghai and Chongqing.</p> <p>The Finance Ministry cited “unripe” conditions for expanding it, without elaborating.</p>

Part of the reason common prosperity is fading is that the policies enacted spooked business owners and slowed growth when Mr. Xi needs China's economy to stay robust. He is preparing for political meetings expected to return him for a third term in power later this year.

But economists and scholars say it is also becoming clearer that common-prosperity goals can't be met without more drastic—and potentially painful—changes that Mr. Xi doesn't appear willing to countenance.

That includes overhauls in China's taxation and social-welfare systems. China's tax system is less progressive than developed countries', with burdens falling mostly on lower-income workers. Raising tax rates on the upper class, who tend to be more politically connected, has faced resistance.

More fundamentally, economists say, China's tax system doesn't raise enough money to fund education, health and other services at levels implied by Mr. Xi's common-prosperity agenda—a problem that has led it to pressure private companies and tycoons to redistribute money.

Personal income taxes in China add up to 1.2% of gross domestic product, compared with about 10% in the U.S. and U.K. Revenue from social-security contributions, at about 6.5% of GDP, is lower than the 9% average among members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, or OECD, according to the International Monetary Fund.

"All those changes involve a lot of political initiatives," said George Magnus, an economist and associate at the China center at Oxford University. "I don't think the government is willing to take them."

The State Council, which is China's top government body, and the Zhejiang government didn't respond to requests for comment.

The phrase "common prosperity" dates back decades. It was used by both Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping to describe the socialist ideals of reducing inequality and polarization in society.

Yet data show that wealth inequality has widened and social mobility has stalled since China's economy began opening to the outside world—trends Mr. Xi views as threats to the party's continued rule. In 2021, the wealthiest 10% of people in China owned 68% of total household wealth, according to the World Inequality Lab.

Signaling his attention to the problem, Mr. Xi told officials in January last year that carrying out a common-prosperity initiative couldn't wait. With China's economy rebounding strongly after the first wave of Covid-19, policy makers saw an opportunity to push changes they hoped would satisfy the leader's aims.

The regulations that followed mainly involved crackdowns on industries seen as making too much money or running too much financial risk, without deeper change to motivate innovation or enhance opportunity for lower- and middle-class Chinese, economists say.

Tighter regulations on property developers reduced some of their risk-taking but helped trigger a real-estate slump. Clampdowns on tech companies and for-profit tutoring firms discouraged monopolistic behavior but led to mass layoffs in those industries, while billions of dollars in market value among listed Chinese companies got wiped out.

Overall growth slowed sharply, and many economists now say China will struggle to hit a government target of around 5.5% growth this year.

Although tech companies and entrepreneurs pledged to donate billions of dollars to common-prosperity initiatives, economists say such one-off gifts don't amount to a sustainable strategy for long-term social changes, while damage from the crackdowns, which suggested that private entrepreneurship was out of fashion, could last for years.

The common-prosperity slogan “almost became a rallying cry among some enterprises who use the term sarcastically to infer a whole set of policies aimed at controlling or even destroying private entrepreneurship in China,” said Victor Shih, an associate professor of political economy at the University of California, San Diego. “I don’t think that’s the message the Chinese government would like to send.”

With growth slowing more than expected, Vice Premier Liu He pledged in March that further regulations would be more “transparent and predictable.”

Some economists say China could revive common prosperity after the party congress this fall, if growth rebounds strongly.

But it is unclear whether Mr. Xi ever had any intention of taking more radical steps to help Chinese people reap a bigger share of growth. One of the simplest ways to do that would be by diverting more income—and control—from the government to the private sector, but that runs counter to Mr. Xi’s impulses, said Mr. Magnus at Oxford and other economists.

Gan Li, a professor of economics at Texas A&M University, said another approach might be to introduce inheritance or capital-gains taxes on individuals, which would redirect more wealth from richer families, but that would also likely face opposition.

Other economists say China needs to change the way local governments are funded—yet another tough task in China’s political climate, as it could reduce Beijing’s authority.

Right now, local governments are charged with providing many social benefits, but they are typically heavily indebted and limited in their ability to raise funds on their own. So they have little incentive to underwrite large-scale welfare programs.

Instead, local officials tend to favor investing in projects that deliver quicker results, like infrastructure, or ones deemed strategically important to Chinese leaders, such as achieving semiconductor independence or achieving more military strength, said Mr. Shih at the University of California, San Diego.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/01 Russia strategy shifts; lengthy war looms
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-strategy-in-ukraine-shifts-after-setbacks-and-a-lengthy-war-looms-11648826490?mod=series_rusukrainenato
GIST	<p>Russia’s war on Ukraine shifted gears this past week, as Moscow, lacking the strength to pursue rapid offensives on multiple fronts, began pulling back from Kyiv and other cities in the north, and refocused for now on seizing parts of the country’s east.</p> <p>The pivot, after five weeks of intense fighting, was a gauge of the intensity and effectiveness of Ukrainian resistance and signaled a decision by the Kremlin to pursue what is likely to become a prolonged war of attrition.</p> <p>Ukraine’s counterattacks—including a helicopter strike inside Russian territory—and Moscow’s redeployment toward Donbas in Ukraine’s east suggest that both sides believe they can win, making it unlikely that peace talks will result in a deal anytime soon.</p> <p>Russia’s “military and political strategy hasn’t changed, it remains to annihilate Ukraine,” said Andriy Zagorodnyuk, a former Ukrainian minister of defense who advises President Volodymyr Zelensky’s government. But he said, “Now, their capabilities no longer match their strategic vision.”</p> <p>That could be a recipe for a prolonged conflict, increasing the stakes for both sides’ ability to raise troops and money and access weapons, ammunition and supplies.</p>

For Ukraine, with its smaller military resources, such a shift to a lengthy conventional war heightens the need for shipments of heavy weapons such as tanks and artillery, Ukrainian officials said.

Russia's declared shift toward trying to seize Donbas could allow it to concentrate firepower on a smaller front, shorten supply lines and make air support easier, giving Moscow a better chance at military success. It would also position Russia to try to encircle some of Ukraine's best units, which are stationed there.

The Russian pullbacks from Kyiv, however, also allow Ukraine to redeploy additional resources to the eastern Donbas front—and to do it much faster because of shorter routes.

Russian announcements that Moscow would limit military operations near Kyiv and Chernihiv, but lengthy convoys of Russian armor began leaving these areas Thursday, and scores of villages in northern Ukraine have been retaken by Ukrainian troops.

Russia initially appeared determined to retain a smaller, blocking force around Kyiv to threaten the Ukrainian capital and prevent a large Ukrainian redeployment to Donbas, Ukrainian officials say. But a threat of encirclement of these Russian forces, northwest or northeast of Kyiv, Friday precipitated a rapid withdrawal toward the Belarus border, often under fire.

"The enemy is not fully successful in retaining the areas that it wishes to keep. Our forces are kicking them out in the northwest and northeast, pushing the enemy away from Kyiv and making another attempt at storming it impossible," Ukrainian presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovych said Friday.

Russia sent some of its best units to Kyiv and northern Ukraine. Many of them have been battered by fierce fighting, and would need considerable time to be reconstituted and prepared for redeployment, military analysts say.

U.S. officials estimate that some 10,000 soldiers out of Russia's 190,000-strong force in Ukraine have been killed, with tens of thousands of others injured or taken prisoner. The elite 4th Guards Tank "Kantemirovskaya" Division lost 46 of its estimated 220 T-80 tanks, according to visual evidence compiled by military analysts.

Seeking to replenish its forces, Russia has been calling up reserves, sending to Ukraine troops deployed in Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia as well as conscripts. Some of these troops, particularly from the Russian National Guard, which usually performs mostly internal-security duties, have refused orders to deploy to Ukraine.

British Air Marshal Edward Stringer, who headed operations for the British Defense Ministry and also helped create Britain's military training program in Ukraine, said Russia no longer has many additional reserves to throw into new offensives.

"Most of the effective combat power is already assigned to the war," he said. So Russian President Vladimir Putin "has to build some more, which is tricky without mobilizing and under sanctions, or concentrate the combat power that he has."

Russian nationalists, dismayed by the retreat from Kyiv, have called on Mr. Putin to mobilize for all-out war.

Igor Strelkov —a former Russian intelligence officer who led a group of Russian military veterans that seized the Ukrainian city of Sloviansk in 2014, sparking the armed conflict in Donbas—complained this week about members of the Russian National Guard refusing Ukrainian deployment and resigning.

"That's why we need a mobilization. Submitted a resignation? Please proceed right away to the infantry company as a private. Under the convoy of your former comrades," Mr. Strelkov wrote on his Telegram channel.

Mr. Strelkov said the retreat from Kyiv and Chernihiv was necessary given the poor execution of the Russian military plan and the threats that these forces face, especially now that spring vegetation will provide concealment for Ukrainian strike groups attacking the Russians' rear.

"If leaving previously taken territory is inevitable anyway, it's best to do it without the enemy annihilating your troops first," Mr. Strelkov wrote Friday. "We will need these troops—the war will be long."

In northeastern Ukraine, Russian forces have tried for weeks to fight their way south, past the city of Izyum in the Kharkiv region. That maneuver, if successful, could allow them to link up with troops pushing from the southeast and encircle Donbas. Much of that southeastern force is still engaged in urban battles in the besieged city of Mariupol—and could renew its push north should Mariupol fall.

Ukraine has deployed some of its best units in Donbas, which comprises the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. While Mariupol, a part of the Donetsk region, has been encircled, Ukraine has largely held the line to the north, including the key cities of Kramatorsk and Slovyansk.

In the Luhansk region, Russia swiftly seized rural areas in the east but hasn't been able to take the major urban area around Severodonetsk, where the Ukrainian regional government for Luhansk is based.

Many Ukrainian officials and military analysts think the conflict is likely to drag on for months, or longer, even as Kyiv and Moscow continue peace negotiations. While these negotiators have made some progress on Ukraine abandoning its aspiration to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in exchange for binding security guarantees from the West and Russia, Kyiv and Moscow still remain far apart on the status of Donbas and Crimea, among other issues.

Even though Russia has a much larger population—145 million to pre-war Ukraine's 37 million—and significantly more military equipment, time isn't necessarily on Moscow's side in a lengthy war of attrition.

"Military potential, as any system, is as strong as its weakest component. And Russia's weakest component is its people. They have a lot of equipment, a lot of armor, but they have a big problem with trained personnel," said Mr. Zagorodnyuk, the former Ukrainian defense minister.

Ukraine, which had an army of some 200,000 troops at the beginning of the war, would by contrast be able to field another force of similar size if necessary, he added. "If there is a long war, the only question is whether Ukraine will have the support of our Western partners, first of all the U.S. And if we have this support, we can outlast Russia," he said.

Until recently, U.S. and allied weapon supplies to Ukraine were premised on estimates that Kyiv would collapse quickly, and that the war would largely be fought as an insurgency. These weapons, such as Stinger anti-aircraft missiles and Javelin and NLAW anti-tank missiles, can be carried by one person and have been heavily used by Ukrainian troops operating as small nimble units.

Instead, Ukraine has been engaged in fighting a large-scale conventional war, using long-range artillery, tanks, air defenses and its own warplanes and combat helicopters—military assets that, while being lost daily, haven't been replenished by the West.

That is slowly beginning to change. On Thursday, U.K. Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said a donor conference of 35 nations agreed to provide Ukraine with long-range artillery, armored vehicles, counter-battery systems and anti-aircraft and coastal-defense weapons. While falling short of the tanks and combat aircraft requested by Mr. Zelensky, these supplies, if delivered quickly, would significantly improve Ukraine's chances.

"The next three weeks will determine whether Russia's war of attrition can succeed. If we, the West, have the sense of urgency and can provide Ukraine with what it's been begging for, then they can break the back of the Russians while the Russians are down, and can win," said retired Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, a

	former commander of the U.S. Army in Europe. “But if we don’t have that sense of urgency, the Russians will have the time to regroup, to re-establish logistics, and to continue grinding down Ukrainian cities and Ukrainian armed forces.”
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 Ukraine assesses damage Russia pullback
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukrainians-count-dead-dig-mass-graves-clear-land-mines-after-russian-pullback-11648970003?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>BUCHA, Ukraine—People in this city buried their neighbors in mass graves, after Russian troops withdrew from the area around Ukraine’s capital, leaving behind corpses, land mines and what Ukrainian officials and independent rights observers said is evidence of potential war crimes.</p> <p>Ukrainian troops had retaken control of the entire Kyiv region, Ukraine’s deputy defense minister, Hanna Malyar, said Saturday, as Russian forces in recent days gave up scores of towns and villages after Ukrainian resistance led to heavy losses.</p> <p>Ukrainians counted the dead and cleared land mines across the area, following the Russian withdrawals and Moscow’s shifting of military operations to Ukraine’s east. In Bucha, fierce fighting left the small city 15 miles northwest of central Kyiv a landscape of shattered buildings and burned-out tanks.</p> <p>Locals buried scores of the dead in mass graves as a cold rain fell. Others flagged down troops to show them where the dead lay.</p> <p>The withdrawing Russian forces “left in their wake a complete disaster and many dangers,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in an overnight address. He added that the region remained unsafe. “Firstly, the bombing might continue,” he said. “Secondly, they are mining this entire territory.”</p> <p>Mr. Zelensky said retreating Russian forces had placed mines in houses, laid trip wires and booby-trapped corpses.</p> <p>The Ukrainian president singled out the cities of Kharkiv and Mariupol as potential targets of renewed attacks as Russia repositions its forces. “In the east of our country, the situation remains extremely difficult,” Mr. Zelensky said. “I emphasize once again: Hard battles lie ahead.”</p> <p>The Kyiv regional military administration published a video Saturday saying Ukrainian armed forces had retaken more than 30 settlements around the capital. Speaking in one of the villages, with charred Russian tanks in the background, the head of the Kyiv military administration, Oleksandr Pavliuk, said Ukrainian forces had ambushed a retreating Russian column.</p> <p>The Ukrainian military is assessing the damage in each town, he said, and emergency services are clearing explosives. “After this, we will give permission to local residents to return,” Mr. Pavliuk said.</p> <p>Bucha’s extensive devastation led authorities to institute a curfew until Tuesday morning. Russian troops had booby-trapped the administrative building with trip-wired grenades, said Andrei Verlaty, a deputy commander of Bucha’s territorial defense brigade.</p> <p>Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Mr. Zelensky, posted a photograph Saturday on Twitter showing the bodies of three men in Bucha he said Russian forces had shot and killed. One appeared to have his hands bound.</p> <p>“The bodies of people with tied hands, who were shot dead by soldiers lie in the streets,” Mr. Podolyak wrote. “These people were not in the military. They had no weapons. They posed no threat. How many more such cases are happening right now in the occupied territories?”</p>

The rights group Human Rights Watch said it has collected evidence of a Russian war crime in Bucha. The group said it had interviewed a woman who had witnessed Russian troops round up five men and shoot one of them in the back of the head, killing him.

“We have documented an unmistakable case of summary execution by Russian Federation forces in Bucha on March 4,” a Human Rights Watch spokeswoman said.

In a report released April 3, the rights group said it had documented several other cases of war crimes by the Russian military in occupied areas of the Chernihiv, Kharkiv and Kyiv regions between Feb. 27 and March 14. These included a case of repeated rape and the summary execution of six men, as well as looting of civilian property, including food, clothing and firewood, the group said.

Ukraine’s Defense Ministry called Bucha a “new Srebrenica,” referring to the 1995 killing of more than 8,000 Muslims during the Bosnian War.

Moscow has rejected war-crimes allegations, including accusations that Russia has targeted civilians.

Also, north of Kyiv, the body of a Ukrainian photojournalist who went missing while working nearly three weeks ago was found in the district of Vyshhorod. Maksym Levin died after being shot twice by Russian forces, according to a statement from Ukraine’s prosecutor general. Another photographer who was with him remains unaccounted for.

The General Staff of the Ukrainian armed forces said Russian troops are likely to maintain some positions around Kyiv and Chernihiv, a city to the north of the capital, to tie Ukrainian forces down while pressing to complete the takeover of Kherson in the south, as well as Luhansk and Donetsk in the east.

To avoid a protracted conflict that would bleed its military, Mr. Podolyak predicted that Russia would relinquish all territories except those in the south and east, where it could dig in and position air defenses to minimize losses. “Without heavy weapons, we won’t be able to drive Russian forces out,” he said.

As Russian military units have moved back from Kyiv, a large number of additional troops have passed into northeastern Ukraine, according to the head of the regional military administration in Sumy.

Southeast of Kyiv, Russia fired missiles overnight at the city of Poltava and conducted strikes on industrial facilities in Kremenchuk early Saturday. Dmytro Lunin, head of the Poltava regional military administration, said rescue workers were extinguishing a blaze in Kremenchuk, adding that there were injuries and possibly deaths.

The Russian Defense Ministry said its forces had destroyed gasoline and diesel fuel-storage facilities at the Kremenchuk oil refinery, which has supplied Ukrainian troops in central and eastern parts of the country, using high-precision long-range airborne and sea-based weapons.

The strike came after Moscow accused Ukraine of firing missiles at an oil depot in Belgorod, a Russian city about 20 miles from the Ukrainian border, in a predawn helicopter raid Friday. A Russian investigative agency on Saturday said it had opened a criminal case against Ukrainian military personnel, saying they committed a terrorist act by executing the raid.

Fierce fighting continued around the strategic eastern city of Izyum. Russian forces fired three short-range ballistic missiles from Crimea, which was annexed by Moscow in 2014, into the region of Odessa, on the Black Sea coast. The head of Odessa’s regional military administration, Maksym Marchenko, said there were casualties, without distinguishing between military or civilian losses.

Russian forces opened fire on protesters in the southern Ukrainian town of Enerhodar, site of Europe’s largest nuclear power plant, on Saturday, after residents demonstrated in support of Ukraine, singing the national anthem.

A video posted on the official Telegram channel of Energoatom, the Ukrainian state company that operates the nuclear plant, showed people scattering under fire. The company said Russian forces detained some people as the crowd dispersed.

The mayor of Tavriisk in the Kherson region has been missing since Friday, the town council said. The head of the Melitopol district council, Serhiy Priyma, has also been held for more than two weeks, along with five school principals. "We are trying to find out from the occupiers what the demands are for his release, but so far they are not saying anything," said the head of the Melitopol district military administration, Ihor Sudakov.

Aside from Bucha, other towns near Kyiv that were recaptured by Ukrainian forces included Ivankiv, Dymyri, Irpin, Vorzel and Hostomel, where Russian paratroopers descended on Feb. 24, the first day of the invasion.

"Hostomel has been liberated but is still being shelled and there are many explosives in the area," said Taras Dumenko, head of the Hostomel village military administration.

Kyiv regional police chief Andriy Niebytov said police and rescue workers were going house to house in Hostomel. "We understand there might be people under the wreckage," he said. Bodies are being taken to the morgue to establish the cause of death.

Ukrainian lawmaker Olha Vasilevska-Smahliuk said a two-day curfew had been imposed in recaptured towns to conduct mine sweeps, but trucks carrying humanitarian aid would be allowed to enter.

Oleksandr Bursuk, the head of a linen factory in Dymyri, said workers' clothing and personal effects had been looted, as well as a delivery truck, which he said he tracked to Belarus.

"There is no occupation army in Dymyri anymore," said Mr. Bursuk. "As a farewell, our 'liberators' were looting everything they could."

A man returning to the village of Velyka Dymyrika filmed the damage he said Russian forces had inflicted on his house. A flat-screen TV had been stabbed with a saber. In a kennel outside, his dog lay dead, apparently shot. "Why would you kill it?" he asked in the video.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/02 Russia halts space station cooperation
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Science_News/2022/04/02/russian-space-agency-roscosmos-suspends-iss-cooperation-sanctions-ukraine-war/6641648922607/
GIST	<p>April 2 (UPI) -- Russia has suspended cooperation with other nations involved with the International Space Station over sanctions levied amid the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>Dmitry Rogozin, the director-general of Russian space agency Roscosmos, made the announcement in a series of tweets Saturday in response to a letter received from NASA Administrator Bill Nelson, a former U.S. senator.</p> <p>Nelson said in a letter sent Wednesday that NASA could continue to cooperate with Russia "to ensure continued safe operations of the ISS" after Roscosmos had sought clarification about the impact of the sanctions on the ISS, according to a copy of the letter shared by Rogozin.</p> <p>Rogozin said in his tweets that he had appealed to Nelson and the heads of the European and Canadian space agencies "demanding the lifting of sanctions" against Russian aerospace companies.</p> <p>European Space Agency Director-General Josef Aschbacher and Canadian Space Agency President Lisa Campbell had also responded to the appeal, Rogozin said.</p>

"The American and Canadian responses are almost carbon-copied," Rogozin said. "With regard to the response of the European Space Agency, Josef Aschbacher acted as a postman."

Rogozin said that Aschbacher said in his response that Russia's request to remove sanctions on aerospace companies would be forwarded to member states of the European Union.

"We are invited to wait until the bureaucracies of all 28 EU countries deign to read the letter of Roscosmos. By this time, either the donkey will die, or the ISS will die by its own death," Rogozin said. "Nevertheless, the position of our partners is clear: the sanctions will not be lifted."

Rogozin said Russia's role with the ISS is "of fundamental importance to ensure the viability and safety of the station" but that the sanctions from the United States, Canada, the European Union and Japan are "aimed at blocking financial, economic and production activities" of its high-tech companies.

"The purpose of the sanctions is to kill the Russian economy, plunge our people into despair and hunger, and bring our country to its knees. It is clear that they will not be able to do this, but the intentions are clear," Rogozin said.

"That's why I believe that the restoration of normal relations between partners in the International Space Station and other joint projects is possible only with the complete and unconditional lifting of illegal sanctions."

The news also came after NASA astronaut Mark Vande Hei returned to Earth on Wednesday with Roscosmos cosmonauts Anton Shkaplerov and Pyotr Dubrov. Shkaplerov was the space station's commander and turned command over to NASA astronaut Tom Marshburn.

There are currently seven astronauts onboard the ISS -- three Russian cosmonauts, three NASA astronauts and one German-born ESA astronaut, Matthias Maurer. With Marshburn, the NASA astronauts are Raja Chari and Kayla Barron.

The three Russian cosmonauts are Sergey Korsakov, Oleg Artemyev and Denis Matveev. It was not immediately clear how the suspension of cooperation would impact the cosmonauts at the ISS.

Artemyev has expressed support for Russia and its decision to invade Ukraine in a statement made last month after he boarded the space station in a yellow and blue uniform, the colors of the Ukrainian flag.

"There is no need to look for secret signs and symbols in our uniform. Color is just color," he said. "Despite the fact that we are in space, we are together with our president and people!"

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/02 Ukraine: Russia forces retreat Kyiv region
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/04/02/ukraine-russia-attack-oil-refinery-kremenchuk/9201648901125/
GIST	<p>April 2 (UPI) -- Russian forces broadly retreated from the Kyiv region Saturday, Ukrainian military officials said.</p> <p>The Russian military left behind dead soldiers and burned vehicles in its retreat, according to witnesses, Ukrainian officials, satellite images and military analysts, signaling a potential major turn in the war which is in its sixth week, The New York Times reported.</p> <p>"The initial Russian operation was a failure and one of its central goals -- the capture of Kyiv -- proved unobtainable for Russian forces," Michael Kofman, the director of Russian studies at C.N.A., a research institute in Arlington, Va., told the Times in a telephone interview Saturday.</p> <p>Ukraine's military also announced that Russian forces have retreated from other areas.</p>

	<p>"Irpın, Bucha, Gostomel and the whole Kyiv region -- liberated from the enemy," Deputy Minister of Defense of Ukraine Anna Malyar said Saturday in a Twitter post.</p> <p>Still, attacks on other cities have continued, and the Pentagon has cautioned that Russian forces near Kyiv could be repositioning for renewed assaults.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/02 Ukraine refugees arrive early than expected
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/ukrainians-arrive-in-wa-state-faster-than-refugee-support-groups-expect-more-help-needed
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Hundreds of people gathered Saturday to show their unwavering support for Ukraine and the many people who have been forced from their homes in the wake of the Russian invasion even as advocates for the refugees said they are being overwhelmed by requests for help from the people arriving everyday.</p> <p>As many as 500 Ukrainians have already arrived in Washington state in the past two weeks -- with more expected to relocate. Officials said the Ukrainians have relocated to Washington six months earlier than expected.</p> <p>Many of them made it thanks to “humanitarian parole status” after escaping the country and going to Europe and Mexico and crossing into America via the southern border.</p> <p>Many refugee support groups and community advocates say more help for Ukrainians is needed.</p> <p>“It seems like every day we got a phone call or somebody show up in our office and say, ‘We need help. We need food. We need clothing of children. We need you to help us find a place to live, a permanent place. We live with friends right now’,” said Van Kuno-Dinh, of the Refugee and Immigrant Services Northwest.</p> <p>When it comes to hosting a refugee, there are a lot of unforeseen costs and a lot of legal considerations to be taken care of.</p> <p>Advocates for the Ukrainians who have already arrived on the humanitarian parolee status are urged to apply for legal asylum as soon as possible.</p> <p>On April 3, a free legal clinic at Everett Community College in the Rainier Building will be held from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. to offer advice to the refugees.</p> <p>Kuno-Dinh said it typically takes two years for people to get legal status through the asylum process.</p> <p>She said it’s important to start that process immediately because it allows people to then apply for Social Security and work permits.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/01 Iran nuclear talks at stalemate
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/04/01/iran-nuclear-deal-terrorism/
GIST	<p>Tehran’s demand that the United States lift its designation of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps as a foreign terrorist organization, and U.S. refusal so far to do that, have brought the year-long negotiations over reviving the Iran nuclear deal to a halt, with no new meetings scheduled and little obvious room for compromise.</p> <p>Since talks being held in Vienna adjourned last month, European participants have shuttled between Washington and Tehran in a vain search for accommodation from both sides. “At this point, nothing</p>

mutually acceptable” has been proposed, according to a U.S. official knowledgeable about the issue who, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive diplomatic and political matter.

Whether the United States will yield in any way is up to President Biden, and “the president hasn’t made a decision,” the official said. “Politically, we know that it’s an extremely difficult step to take.” For the moment, head U.S. negotiator Robert Malley said at a foreign policy forum last weekend, success “is not just around the corner, and not inevitable.”

Those beyond the inner circles in the two capitals are growing increasingly worried. “We must conclude this negotiation. Much is at stake,” Enrique Mora, the European Union deputy foreign policy chief wrote on Twitter last week before visits to both Washington and Tehran early this week. The E.U. is coordinating the talks between Iran and other signers of the original 2015 deal, which are Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China.

Although the talks essentially involve Iran and the United States, which withdrew from the agreement in 2018, Tehran has refused to speak directly to the Biden administration, which is technically only an indirect participant, speaking to Iran through the Europeans.

While there is a handful of other, less contentious issues still to be settled, people familiar with the matter indicated that disagreement now revolves almost entirely around the Revolutionary Guard Corps issue. Earlier U.S. consideration of a public Iranian statement disavowing regional aggression, in exchange for the terror delisting, is no longer on the table, the people said.

For the administration, the biggest impediment to lifting the designation is the likely reaction in Congress, where the delisting issue has only increased considerable bipartisan opposition to any revived agreement with Iran. In briefings and meetings with lawmakers in recent weeks, Malley and Brett McGurk, the Middle East coordinator at the National Security Council, have outlined what they believe would be the negligible effect of the delisting, as well as the peril of not concluding a deal.

The Revolutionary Guard Corps and its leaders are under a wealth of other State and Treasury Department terrorism sanctions that would remain in place, including Iran as one of four countries on the official U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism. Regardless of what happens in the negotiations, Malley said at the weekend conference in Qatar, the Revolutionary Guard Corps “will remain sanctioned under U.S. law and our policies, and our perceptions” of it “will not change.”

Speaking at the same forum, Kamal Kharazi, former Iranian foreign minister and current adviser to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, said the Revolutionary Guard Corps “certainly must be removed” from the foreign terrorist organization list. When Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian indicated some flexibility in a recent television interview, he quickly backtracked, indicating in an Instagram post that the issue was a “red line” for Iran.

Designation as a foreign terrorist organization has enormous symbolic significance for both Iran and the United States. President Donald Trump announced the listing in April 2019, a year after he withdrew from the nuclear deal. The move was pushed by his secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, and national security adviser John Bolton, as part of what Trump called his “maximum pressure” sanctions campaign against Iran.

At the time, it was also widely seen as Trump’s attempt to boost the electoral chances of Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who campaigned on security issues but who nonetheless failed the next day to garner enough votes to form a government.

The listing of the Revolutionary Guard Corps, an elite wing of the Iranian military responsible for its regional activities in Iraq and elsewhere, remains the only time the United States has so labeled part of another nation’s government. While the measure was hailed by some lawmakers, a number of commentators and sanctions experts argued that it pointlessly set a bad precedent, and would likely increase, rather than decrease, Iranian aggression.

In promoting negotiations to return to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, the Biden administration has argued that Trump's withdrawal from the deal, which sharply limited Iran's nuclear activities and brought it under international monitoring in exchange for the lifting of U.S. nuclear sanctions, has undermined U.S. security by bring Iran closer than ever to producing a nuclear weapon.

"This is no longer a thought experiment. What might happen if the nuclear shackles of the JCPOA were lifted and we tried something different ... in the form of maximum pressure?" State Department spokesman Ned Price said Thursday. The Trump administration, he said, promised "a so-called better deal with Iran, an Iran whose proxies were cowed ... whose support for terrorism would be diminished ... whose ballistic missile program would be checked, all of those things turned out not only to be not true, but in almost every case the exact opposite has come to fruition."

At the same time, while continuing to deny it seeks a nuclear bomb, Iran has vastly expanded the quality and quantity of uranium enrichment and is believed now only weeks away from assembling enough to fuel a weapon. It expanded other aggressive activities even as Trump reimposed sanctions that had been lifted by the Iran deal and imposed more than 1,500 more. Between 2019 and 2020, Price said, the number of attacks against U.S. personnel and facilities in Iraq by Iran-backed groups "went up 400 percent."

Much of the Vienna negotiations over the past year were devoted to disagreements between Iran insisting that all U.S. sanctions be lifted, and administration insistence that a return to the deal involved only those that were "nuclear related." Those issues, along with questions of sequencing and the unfreezing of certain Iranian assets, have now been largely resolved.

But as word spread that the biggest remaining issue on the table was the terrorism designation of the Revolutionary Guard Corps, opponents of the deal, including virtually all Republicans vowed to redouble their efforts to stop the agreement, and a number of Democrats expressed worries.

"We are highly concerned about reports indicating the potential lifting" of the foreign terrorist organization designation of the Revolutionary Guard Corps, a bipartisan group of 21 House members wrote Biden last month, saying that the combination of not "adequately addressing Iran's role as the world's leading state sponsor of terror," and providing billions of dollars in sanctions relief would provide "a clear path for Iranian proxies to continue fueling terrorism."

Any administration action is further complicated by reported U.S. intelligence indicating ongoing Iranian plots to target Pompeo and other former U.S. officials whom Tehran holds responsible for the drone strike in 2020 that killed Qasem Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force, the Revolutionary Guard Corps branch specializing in unconventional warfare. But others have warned that Iranian and U.S. leaders have "painted themselves into a corner" by allowing the issue to become what may ultimately kill any prospect of a deal.

"Failure to secure the nuclear deal will very likely lead to unpredictable and possible uncontrollable escalation, and almost certainly skyrocketing oil and gas prices," Trita Parsi, an Iran expert and executive vice president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft wrote Thursday. "The political costs to both the United States and Iran of either delisting" the Revolutionary Guard Corps or "dropping the demand to delist, respectively, pale in comparison."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/01 Ukraine president strikes an ominous tone
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/01/world/europe/zelensky-russian-military-speech-video.html
GIST	President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine called on ordinary people of his country and Russia alike to refuse to cooperate in Moscow's invasion and occupation, and accused Russian forces in northern Ukraine of planting mines as they retreat, making it dangerous for people to return.

The Russians have even booby-trapped dead bodies with explosives, he charged in his nightly video address, posted early Saturday morning in Ukraine — Friday night in the United States.

Even as Russian forces pull back from Kyiv, the capital, and the city of Chernihiv farther north, “in the east of our country, the situation remains extremely difficult,” he said. “The Russian militaries are being accumulated in Donbas, in the Kharkiv direction. They are preparing for new powerful blows. We are preparing for even more active defense.”

Mr. Zelensky’s video messages have galvanized support among Ukraine’s allies, but his new address had an ominous tone, threatening his own people with unspecified consequences for cooperating with the invading Russians.

“The responsibility for collaboration is inevitable,” he said.

He noted that the Russians have appointed people to take over local governments and enterprises in areas they occupied — pointedly calling them “gauleiters,” a term for a regional administrator in Nazi Germany.

“There will be problems for cooperation with them or with the occupiers directly. This is the last warning,” Mr. Zelensky said.

He also asked Russians to resist conscription into the Kremlin’s military, which he said would result in “guaranteed death for many very young guys.”

“Warn each such conscript, their parents,” he said. “We don’t need more dead people here. Save your children so that they do not become villains. Don’t send them to the army. Do whatever you can to keep them alive. At home. At their home. The Russians won’t be told the whole truth about this conscription and about the fate of the conscripts. But still, if you can convey the truth to them — do it.”

In northern Ukraine, where Russian forces have been pulling back from positions around Kyiv and Chernihiv, “they are mining all this territory,” Mr. Zelensky said. “Mining houses, equipment, even the bodies of killed people. Too many tripwire mines, too many other dangers.”

His claims about mining could not be independently verified.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/01 US to help transfer Soviet tanks to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/01/us/politics/us-tanks-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Biden administration will work with allies to transfer Soviet-made tanks to bolster Ukrainian defenses in the country’s eastern Donbas region, a U.S. official said on Friday.</p> <p>The decision to act as an intermediary to help transfer the Soviet-made tanks, which Ukrainian troops know how to use, comes in response to a request from President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine, the official said. It marks the first time in the war that the United States has helped transfer tanks.</p> <p>The official said the transfers would begin soon, but declined to say how many tanks would be sent, or from which countries they would come. They will allow Ukraine to conduct long-range artillery strikes on Russian targets in Donbas, said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly.</p> <p>The tanks’ arrival could be another signal of a new phase in the war, which is five weeks old and has been dominated by Russian attacks on Ukrainian cities and installations from the air, and a stalled Russian advance on the ground. Earlier this week, Russian officials indicated that they were refocusing their efforts on eastern Ukraine, where Russian-backed separatists have been fighting Ukrainian soldiers since 2014.</p>

Mr. Zelensky called on Sunday for NATO allies to provide tanks and planes, in addition to the antitank and antiaircraft weaponry that have become a staple of the arms transfers to Ukraine from the West. Frustrated at what he views as a slow pace of weapons transfers, Mr. Zelensky asked specifically for tanks, in remarks a day after President Biden met with senior Ukrainian officials in Poland.

An angry Mr. Zelensky criticized the West for what he called its “Ping-Pong” about weapons transfers. “I’ve talked to the defenders of Mariupol today,” he said, in a reference to the besieged city that has been under an onslaught from Russia for four weeks. “If only those who have been thinking for 31 days on how to hand over dozens of jets and tanks had 1 percent of their courage.”

In the past, the Biden administration has taken pains to call the weapons it is providing to Ukraine defensive, and has focused on smaller, easily portable arms. But as the war has progressed, the definition of defensive has become more elastic.

Ukraine had already found one source of tanks, capturing at least 161 from Russia on the battlefield, according to the military analysis site Oryx, though Russia has also destroyed a number of Ukrainian tanks. For its part, Russia has captured 43 Ukrainian tanks, according to analysts who study photos and videos on social media.

The decision to help transfer the tanks comes as the Ukrainian military has continued to turn back Russia’s ground advance. Pentagon officials have been quick to point out that Russia’s pivot to Donbas and away from capturing Kyiv, the capital, might be a necessity for Moscow after Russian forces stalled out in the central part of the country.

On Wednesday, Biden administration officials, citing declassified U.S. intelligence, said that President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia had been misinformed by his advisers about the Russian military’s problems in Ukraine. The intelligence, American officials said, also showed what appeared to be growing tension between Mr. Putin and his defense minister, Sergei K. Shoigu, who was once among the most trusted members of the Kremlin’s inner circle.

Russian officials have disputed the allegations, with the Kremlin on Thursday calling it a “complete misunderstanding” of the situation that could have “bad consequences.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/02 Israel forces kill 3 militants in shootout
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/02/world/middleeast/israel-palestinians-west-bank.html
GIST	<p>JERUSALEM — Israeli security forces killed three Palestinian militants in the occupied West Bank early Saturday morning, as they continued to scale up their operations in response to a wave of terrorist attacks in Israel.</p> <p>The Israeli police said in a statement that the militants had been intercepted while driving through the northern West Bank, after the authorities received a tip that they were about to carry out an attack. The three men were killed in a subsequent shootout that also left four Israeli soldiers wounded, the police said. The Islamic Jihad militant group later confirmed that three of its members had been killed by Israeli security forces on Saturday morning, but it did not comment on the claims about a potential attack.</p> <p>The episode brings the number of Palestinians killed in Israeli military operations in the West Bank this week to at least six. Three others were killed on Thursday morning during an Israeli raid in Jenin, a city in the northern West Bank, Palestinian health officials said.</p> <p>Israel security forces have bolstered their presence across Israel and the occupied territories since a Palestinian gunman killed five people in Bnei Brak, a city in central Israel, on Tuesday. That was the latest in a string of terrorist attacks in Israel that killed 11 people since March 22.</p>

The army has sent several extra battalions to the West Bank, called up reservists and posted reinforcements along the boundary between Israel and Gaza. The police said they had turned their focus almost exclusively to counterterrorism operations while scaling up their presence on the streets.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett also called on Israeli civilians with licensed firearms to carry their guns with them in public.

The measures reflect the heightened sense of anxiety in Israel after three unusually brazen and deadly attacks, in three Israeli cities that have rarely been at the center of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Last week, before the attack in Bnei Brak, an Arab citizen of Israel stabbed three people and rammed another with his vehicle, killing all four, in Beersheba, a quiet city in southern Israel. Days later, two other Arab citizens of Israel shot dead two policemen in Hadera, a city on the Mediterranean coast. Unusually, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for that attack.

Officials and analysts fear that the violence could escalate in the coming weeks, when the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which began on Saturday, will overlap with Passover and Easter for the first time in several years.

The festivals are expected to compound tensions in the Old City of Jerusalem, where access to and control over a holy site sacred to both Jews and Muslims — known to Jews as Temple Mount and to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary — has long been at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Hamas, the Islamist militant group that holds sway in the Gaza Strip, warned in a statement Friday night that Israel would face “consequences” if it allowed Israeli troops or Jewish worshipers to enter the Aqsa Mosque compound on top of Temple Mount. It did not specify what those consequences would be.

Tensions over the mosque — coupled with Israeli efforts to evict Palestinians from a strategic area of the city — prompted Hamas to fire several rockets toward Jerusalem from Gaza in May, setting off an 11-day war. But Israeli officials believe that Hamas is most likely wary of directly organizing attacks from Gaza, because the group does not want to risk another full-scale escalation in Gaza so soon after the last war.

In a sign of de-escalation, Palestinian political groups in Gaza on Wednesday decided against commemorating Land Day, a major anniversary in the Palestinian calendar, with a protest near the boundary between Gaza and Israel. They instead gathered on the coast, reducing the risk of a confrontation with Israeli border guards.

Prayers on Friday night and Saturday morning at Al Aqsa Mosque also passed without incident.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/02 Yemen warring parties agree to cease-fire
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/02/world/middleeast/yemen-cease-fire.html
GIST	<p>BEIRUT, Lebanon — The warring parties in Yemen have agreed to a two-month truce that will go into effect on Saturday, the first coordinated cease-fire in years, providing some hope for a reduction of violence in a war that has roiled the Arabian Peninsula and caused a crushing humanitarian crisis.</p> <p>The truce, which was brokered by the United Nations, includes a stop to all attacks inside Yemen and outside its borders; the entry of fuel ships to a rebel-controlled port; and the resumption of some commercial flights at the international airport in Yemen’s capital, Sana, for the first time in many years.</p> <p>“The aim of this truce is to give Yemenis a necessary break from violence, relief from the humanitarian suffering and, most importantly, hope that an end to this conflict is possible,” Hans Grundberg, the United Nations special envoy for Yemen, said in a statement announcing the agreement on Friday.</p> <p>President Biden welcomed the truce.</p>

“The cease-fire must be adhered to, and as I have said before, it is imperative that we end this war,” he said in a statement. “After seven years of conflict, negotiators must undertake the hard and necessary work to reach political compromises that can bring about an enduring future of peace for all the people of Yemen.”

The truce, to begin at 7 p.m. Saturday in Yemen, is the first cease-fire agreed to by all sides since 2016. It coincides with the first day of Ramadan, the Muslim holy month of fasting.

Officials and analysts welcomed the move but cautioned that it was at best a first step in a long, complicated process of working through the many issues that have shattered Yemen, ravaged its economy and undermined the security of its wealthy, oil-producing neighbors.

The conflict began in 2014 when Houthi rebels seized Sana and much of the country’s northwest, sending the government into exile. A few months later, a military coalition led by Saudi Arabia intervened with a vast air campaign, hoping to drive back the Houthis, who are supported by Iran, and restore the government.

But the war settled into a grinding stalemate. Coalition jets destroyed infrastructure and bombed weddings and funerals, killing civilians. The Houthis deployed child soldiers, laid land mines and launched increasingly sophisticated drone and missile attacks at Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, another coalition member. The Yemeni government remained mired in infighting with other factions supposedly on its side.

The United States has not been directly involved in the war but is a major supplier of bombs and jets to members of the coalition and has provided Saudi Arabia with technology and intelligence to help defend its southern border with Yemen.

As the war progressed, the Houthis received military equipment and training from Iran, the Saudis’ regional nemesis, and launched increasingly sophisticated attacks on Saudi Arabia and, more recently, the United Arab Emirates. One attack last month set ablaze two large storage tanks at an oil facility in the western Saudi city of Jeddah.

Diplomats from the United Nations, other gulf nations and the United States have been trying for years to broker peace talks, efforts that have so far produced only short-term reductions in violence.

The barriers to the reunification of the country and lasting peace are many.

The Houthis’ grip on Sana remains firm, regardless of years of coalition airstrikes and offensives by the Yemeni army and its allies. The movement has set up a de facto administration to govern its territory and is not likely to give up control willingly without exacting concessions that the Yemeni government and the coalition may be loath to grant.

The coalition’s Yemeni allies are a fractious grouping that includes parts of the Yemeni army and armed successionists who have fought against each other. Yemen’s president, Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi, is widely unpopular and seen as out of touch with the suffering of Yemenis, giving him little ability to unify the ranks.

And Iran has found that adding fuel to the war is an easy way to bog down Saudi Arabia, a practice it might not easily give up.

Still, the main combatants all appeared to be on board with the truce.

Yemen’s foreign minister, Ahmed bin Mubarak, welcomed the truce and said that two fuel ships would soon unload in the Houthi-controlled port of Hudaydah, easing a coalition blockade that has made fuel prices skyrocket.

	<p>He also said that limited international flights would soon resume at Sana's airport, which the coalition bombed early in the war and has kept closed to all but limited humanitarian flights. That has made it much harder for Yemenis from northern Yemen to travel, including those wounded in coalition strikes who need treatment abroad.</p> <p>Muhammad Abdel-Salam, a Houthi spokesman, expressed support for the truce on Twitter. Mohammed al-Houthi, a senior Houthi official, wrote that "its credibility will be achieved by its implementation."</p> <p>Mr. Grundberg, the United Nations envoy, said he would use the truce for further discussions with the parties "with the aim to reach a permanent cease-fire, address urgent economic and humanitarian measures and resume the political process."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/02 State courts strike down redistricting maps
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/02/us/politics/congressional-maps-gerrymandering-midterms.html
GIST	<p>State courts in both Democratic and Republican states have been aggressively striking down gerrymandered political maps, as this year's redistricting fights drag on and begin to create chaos in upcoming primary elections.</p> <p>In Maryland, a state judge last week threw out a congressional map drawn by Democrats, citing an "extreme gerrymander." In North Carolina, the State Supreme Court in February struck down maps drawn by Republicans. And in New York, a state judge ruled on Thursday that a map drawn by Democrats had been "unconstitutionally drawn with political bias."</p> <p>The flood of rulings reflects an emerging reality: that state courts, rather than federal ones, have become a primary firewall against gerrymandering as both Democrats and Republicans try to carve out maximum advantages in the maps they control. The parties have been emboldened to do so by a 2019 Supreme Court decision that federal courts cannot hear challenges to partisan gerrymandering, though they can still hear challenges to racial gerrymandering.</p> <p>At the same time, however, state judges in at least five states — many, though not all, from the opposing party of the one that drew the districts — have slapped down contorted maps as illegal partisan gerrymanders.</p> <p>"There's a fire, and at least some people are holding the hose," said Chad Dunn, an elections lawyer who has represented Democrats in redistricting cases.</p> <p>Many appeals and final decisions remain, but for now the flurry of court decisions leaves the redistricting cycle roughly where it has stood for weeks: in a surprising draw.</p> <p>Neither Republicans nor Democrats have gained a distinct advantage through the once-in-a-decade process in which state legislatures draw maps and the parties' allies fight over them in the courts. This cycle has not proved to be the nightmare many Democrats had feared, but the recent court decisions have slowed their attempt to claw back to a more even map through aggressive gerrymandering of their own.</p> <p>The legal back and forth has also left some states' maps in limbo relatively late in the primary calendar, creating confusion in states like North Carolina and Maryland that have had to delay primary elections. Delays resulting from legal challenges are common in redistricting cycles, but the process is occurring especially late this year because the pandemic significantly delayed census results and slowed the start of redistricting.</p> <p>In states like New York and North Carolina, the judge or justices striking down a party's maps have come from the other party.</p>

“It’s clearly a factor, and although I don’t want to call the courts partisan, judges matter,” said Michael Li, a redistricting expert at the Brennan Center for Justice. He added that judges who were willing to hear such cases, and decide them favorably for the challenger, often “happened to be the opposite party of the party that drew the maps.”

But in other cases, judges have defied political expectations.

Narrowly divided state supreme courts in Ohio and Wisconsin that are controlled by conservatives have sided with Democratic maps — though in each case the court has a swing justice who often sides with liberal members. And in Wisconsin, the State Supreme Court’s choice of a map drawn by Gov. Tony Evers, a Democrat, was [later overturned](#) by the U.S. Supreme Court.

In Maryland, an aggressive map drawn by Democrats was invalidated last week by a state court judge, [Lynne Battaglia](#), who served as chief of staff to former Senator Barbara A. Mikulski, a five-term Democrat from Maryland who was appointed as the state’s U.S. attorney by President Bill Clinton.

Doug Mayer, the president of Fair Maps Maryland, the organization aligned with Gov. Larry Hogan, a Republican, that challenged the state’s maps, said that he had been told by his lawyers not to say anything in public about Judge Battaglia’s politics and that “I’m very glad I did.” Gerrymandering, Mr. Mayer said, should be a practice both major parties agree to eliminate.

“I think gerrymandering is voter suppression no matter who does it,” Mr. Mayer said. “Republicans who do it in Texas and North Carolina are just as bad as the S.O.B.s up here. More people need to say that.”

The Supreme Court this year has made inconsistent rulings about whether lower courts can order legislatures back to the drawing board.

In February, the [justices reinstated an Alabama congressional map](#) after a lower court had ordered the Republican-controlled state to draw a second Black-majority district. But in March, the Supreme Court [invalidated a Wisconsin congressional map](#) drawn by the state’s Democratic governor and ordered a new one to be produced.

“This unprecedented act and inconsistent application of judicial power are manifestly and sadly undemocratic,” said Eric H. Holder Jr., the former attorney general and the chairman of the National Democratic Redistricting Committee.

Marc Elias, a Democratic lawyer and prominent voting rights advocate, argued that his defense of maps that clearly help Democrats was not inconsistent with his fight against Republican gerrymanders.

“What voters expect will be a fair map in Alabama won’t necessarily be the same thing in a state like Maine,” he said. “I tend to look at the maps in the states and ask a question: ‘Is it legal or is it not legal?’ I leave it to others to be social scientists about whether they think it is objectionable or not for other reasons.”

State courts are a relatively new venue for redistricting cases. For decades, most legal challenges to gerrymandered maps played out in the federal courts, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was often used to challenge unfairly drawn districts.

But in 2017, four years after the Supreme Court [hollowed out](#) many of the protections of the Voting Rights Act, the League of Women Voters [challenged Pennsylvania’s 2011 congressional maps](#) in the state court system, arguing that the state’s Constitution “protects the right of voters to participate in the political process, to express political views, to affiliate with or support a political party, and to cast a vote.”

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court, which leaned Democratic, sided with the women’s group in January 2018, finding that the maps had [“clearly, plainly and palpably” violated the state’s Constitution](#). The decision served as a signal to lawyers and good government groups across the country.

	<p>“There’s a renewed interest in this rich vein of state constitutional law and state constitutional tradition that many people had ignored, because as lawyers, we’ve been training for 60 years that the federal court is where we’re going to vindicate rights,” Mr. Li said. “And we’ve sort of tended to treat state courts and state constitutions almost as a stepchild. And then, we’re realizing there’s actually a lot there.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/02 Russia oil faces market strains
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/02/climate/oil-tankers-russia.html
GIST	<p>A tanker loaded with one million barrels of Russian oil set sail from Murmansk this month, headed for Philadelphia. Then, in the middle of the Atlantic, it did an abrupt U-turn.</p> <p>The ship, Beijing Spirit, had apparently lost the buyer for its oil. It removed “Philadelphia” as its listed destination, according to the global maritime data provider MarineTraffic, and listed its new destination as “For Orders,” which indicates that the oil on board is for sale. The tanker then veered back toward Europe before spending several days bouncing round the Mediterranean, “presumably hoping to offload in more ‘friendly’ territory,” said John van Schaik, an oil-industry expert at the energy information company Energy Intelligence.</p> <p>The meandering journey offers a glimpse into the tumult that has roiled the trade in oil, Russia’s most lucrative export, as the United States, Canada, Britain and Australia move to ban imports of Russian oil because of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Overall, more than 20 tankers that have departed from Russian ports since the invasion — together carrying almost 8.5 million barrels of oil — now list their status as “For Orders” or “Drifting,” which indicates a lack of destination, according to the Russian Tanker Tracking Group, an initiative led by the Ukraine government to observe Russian oil sales. Other tankers now list final destinations like “ZZZ.”</p> <p>Mr. van Schaik said it was uncommon to see so many tankers sailing under “for orders” status, and it likely had to do with the U.S. ban on Russian imports combined with self-sanctioning among oil companies. (Tankers sometimes do change destinations or are turned back if there is a mishap at the accepting refinery, for example.)</p> <p>It’s not always possible to know where the oil will end up, he said, but traders could quietly sell it to refiners that cared less about their reputation than about price. “Once you put the crude somewhere in a tank on land, it is anonymous,” Mr. van Schaik said. “You blend it with some other crude, load it on another tanker and sell it as European Sour Blend and nobody knows its origin was Russia.”</p> <p>At the same time, at least seven tankers are still sailing toward the United States to offload their shipments before the U.S. ban on Russian oil takes full effect on April 21.</p> <p>The United States imports only a small fraction of its oil from Russia, but nevertheless gasoline prices in America have been soaring in part because of the uncertainty over global supplies caused by the Ukraine invasion. On Thursday, President Biden, under pressure to bring down high American gasoline prices, said that the United States would release up to 180 million barrels of oil from its emergency reserves, a release at an unprecedented scale.</p> <p>But in fact, Russia — the world’s third largest oil producer behind the United States and Saudi Arabia — is still exporting plenty of oil. Despite the global condemnation of Russia’s attack on Ukraine, Russian exports of oil and oil-derived products have yet to show a significant decline, according to data from Kpler, the commodity data and analysis firm.</p> <p>Some countries, like India, Singapore and Turkey, have sharply increased their receipts of Russian oil in the weeks since the invasion, according to a separate tally by a Ukraine-led effort to investigate the companies and countries that continue to buy and sell Russian oil and gas. And the European Union has</p>

been unable to agree on an oil embargo among concerns that such a move would push economies in to recession, though Germany has said it intends to phase out Russian oil imports by the end of the year.

Oleg Ustenko, economic adviser to Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky, said in an interview from Kyiv that the oil trade means Russia is continuing to earn foreign currency to fund its war against Ukraine. Oil and gas revenues made up almost half of Russia's federal budget in 2021.

"Whoever is buying this oil is financing war crimes," he said. "We're tracking every ship loaded with Russian oil."

The big question is what happens next.

Last month, the International Energy Agency projected that Russian oil exports would fall significantly by April as sanctions take hold and more buyers shun exports. That shortfall could reach 3 million barrels a day, and could trigger a global oil supply shock, the energy agency said.

But Russia is defying those expectations. A port loading schedule obtained by Energy Intelligence shows that major Russian ports plan, at least on paper, to export almost 2.9 million barrels of oil a day in April, up significantly from both the previous month and from the same period last year.

Much of that demand is expected to come from Asia. India's purchases of Russian oil, in particular, has jumped more than 700 percent in the five weeks since the start of the war in Ukraine compared to the previous five weeks, according to data from the Russian Tanker Tracking Group.

As shipments to Asia have risen, Europe has shown a desire to cut purchases of Russian crude, said Reid L'Anson, senior commodity economist at Kpler, said in an email.

Tracking the drifting oil tankers at sea was important to start figuring out the new picture for Russian oil exports, he said. While it wasn't necessarily out of the ordinary to have some tankers with unknown destinations, "given the situation in Russia, tracking these flows will be critical," he said. "I'm going to be very interested to see just how much Asia fills the gap left by European buying," he added.

Part of the West's shift away from Russian oil has come on the heels of growing public pressure.

When the Minerva Virgo, a 50,000-ton Croatia-flagged tanker carrying Russian petrochemicals, docked in New York last week, the environmental group Greenpeace staged a protest in the harbor, with activists in rubber boats holding up signs that read "Oil Fuels War."

(Several days later, a smaller tanker carrying Russian chemicals also headed for New York, the Vinjerac, changed its destination to "Drifting" a short distance from the shore and has not docked.)

In the United Kingdom, dockworkers at the Birkenhead Docks in northwest England earlier this month refused to unload a German-flagged tanker. Workers would "under no circumstances unload any Russian oil," a local union leader told Sky News. The United Kingdom has banned Russian tankers from British ports but the order doesn't apply to vessels from other countries carrying Russian oil.

In response to the invasion, major oil companies have said they are stepping away from their investments in Russia. Companies like BP, Shell, TotalEnergies and Exxon Mobil have all said they would not sign new oil contracts with Russia.

"Efforts to track the flow of these fossil fuels and expose the companies who have been profiteering through conflict and climate breakdown have shown that they are receptive to public pressure," said Mike Davis, the chief executive of Global Witness, an environmental advocacy group that is working with Ukraine to track tankers continuing to carry Russian oil.

	<p>The ship that made a U-turn in the Atlantic, the Beijing Spirit, was chartered by Bermuda-based tanker company Teekay Corporation, and was carrying crude from Lukoil, Russia's second-largest energy company after state-controlled Gazprom. Lukoil, which is private, has more than 200 franchises in the United States, including in the Philadelphia area.</p> <p>Early Friday morning, the tracking data showed the Beijing Spirit docking in Santa Panagia, an oil terminal on the eastern coast of Sicily, Italy. It was not immediately clear whether its cargo of oil had been sold or offloaded yet, but it was no longer signaling for orders. Teekay said the tanker was loaded before the U.S. ban and was not in breach of any sanctions laws. Lukoil did not respond to a request for comment.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	04/01 China Covid outbreak ravages hospital
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/01/world/asia/china-covid-shanghai.html
GIST	<p>A coronavirus outbreak is ravaging a hospital in Shanghai for older adults, underscoring the difficulties officials have had in containing infections even as the city imposed a 10-day staggered lockdown.</p> <p>Two orderlies at the Shanghai Donghai Elderly Care Hospital said in interviews that the coronavirus was spreading widely among the mostly older patients in the facility, and that people had died on each of the past three days. The two, who declined to be named for fear of losing their jobs, said that on a recent night they had been asked to carry a body into a room where other bodies were being stored.</p> <p>The two said they did not know how the people had died, but said that many had been infected with Covid, and that there was a shortage of tests and other resources. The New York Times also spoke with a Shanghai resident, Chen Jielei, who said her 81-year-old mother tested positive for Covid-19 in the hospital.</p> <p>The situation points to an unfolding health care crisis in China's largest city, and exposes a vulnerable group in the country's otherwise highly effective Covid-19 strategy: the elderly.</p> <p>China's efforts to eliminate infections with lockdowns, travel restrictions, mass testing and surveillance had largely kept Covid out since it first emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan two years ago. But with the rise of the highly transmissible Omicron variant, China has in recent months struggled to quash outbreaks. Lockdowns were imposed in major cities like Xi'an and Shenzhen, as well as the entire northern province of Jilin.</p> <p>In Shanghai, officials have argued the city plays too crucial an economic role to be completely closed down. But the surge in cases prompted officials last week to impose a staggered shutdown. First the eastern and then the western halves of the city were to close businesses, suspend public transportation and confine residents in their buildings so that mass testing could be carried out.</p> <p>The rollout has been messy. Grocery store shelves have been emptied as residents went on panic buying sprees. People with life-threatening conditions posted calls for help online when they could not get to hospitals for help. Quarantine facilities and hospitals have overflowed with people who tested positive, who must be confined in such facilities even if asymptomatic.</p> <p>But the crisis in the Donghai hospital exposes a deeper challenge: how to protect older Chinese, who are already more vulnerable to the virus, particularly if they live in facilities besieged by it. Making matters worse, just over half of people 80 and older have had two shots, and less than 20 percent of people in that age group have received a booster, Zeng Yixin, a vice minister of the National Health Commission, said recently.</p> <p>Officials have pointed to the outbreak in Hong Kong, where deaths spiked in recent weeks, particularly among unvaccinated older adults, as a sign of concern.</p>

It is not clear how many people have died at the Donghai hospital, and whether the deaths are directly linked to the Covid outbreak there, which was previously reported by The Wall Street Journal. A woman who picked up the phone at the Donghai Elderly Care Hospital confirmed an outbreak of Covid there, but declined to say how many cases there were or to provide other details. Bloggers shared photos and descriptions of the outbreak in the Donghai facility on Chinese social media, but it went unreported by official Chinese media. Shanghai has not yet officially reported any deaths from Covid. Calls to the Shanghai Municipal Center for Disease Control and Prevention went unanswered on Friday.

The two orderlies, who shared proof of their work at the facility, said they had been recruited recently to work at the hospital without being told about the situation. They were shocked to find when they arrived that they would be working in a ward filled with patients who had Covid. They said that because they had come into contact with sick patients, they were being confined to the hospital and could not leave.

One night, around 3 a.m., they were woken up by hospital staff and given a duty they said they were not hired to perform: carrying a body away to a makeshift morgue. They said that five of them took the body to a room where a large number of bodies were being stored.

In a different wing of the hospital, Zhang Meizhen, the mother of Ms. Chen, the Shanghai resident, tested positive for Covid-19 in the hospital last week. Ms. Zhang's symptoms were mild, Ms. Chen said in a phone interview. But she was still worried because there had been no doctors or nurses attending to her, and her mother was not vaccinated.

"The management of their hospital is a mess, and there is no food. They only had their meal at 9:30 last night," Ms. Chen said. "My mother's feet and hands hurt, but no one has given her any medicine."

With much of the city under lockdown, Ms. Chen said she was unable to get to the hospital to visit her mother.

"We are absolutely worried," she said. "Our family is desperate, we can't go to see her, and we can't bring her back, either."

In another hospital in the eastern part of the city, Shen Li, a 45-year-old businessman, said that his 77-year-old father, Shen Ruigen, had died two days after testing positive. Mr. Shen said that he had not been allowed access to his father's body or to see his 83-year-old mother, who has been confined in a residential building alone since mid-March.

According to Mr. Shen, his father, who had been suffering from diabetes and kidney failure and needed to take various prescription medicines on a daily basis, tested positive at a hospital in Shanghai on March 26. He went to the Fudan University Affiliated Pudong Medical Center for treatment but was told that he needed to wait for seven to eight hours, because there were more than 400 people in line.

While waiting in line, Mr. Shen ran out of medication. He couldn't get emergency hemodialysis, a treatment that helps filter his blood. On March 28, his father was transferred to two other hospitals, but his condition deteriorated quickly, and he died of heart failure.

"I haven't been able to live with the fact that my father died alone," said Mr. Shen in a telephone interview on Friday. "I could do nothing to stop his death."

Qin Xianfeng, a local health official in the district of Pudong who Mr. Shen said had been in touch with him about his father's death this week, declined to comment when reached by telephone on Friday.

Mr. Shen added that he was especially worried about his mother, who was confined at home alone and relied on the daily supply of food from the volunteers at her neighborhood. "We haven't told her about my father's death," Mr. Shen said.

"She couldn't take it alone," he said. "There is no one else by her side."

HEADLINE	04/01 Seattle rent prices exponential growth
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/local/seattlenews/article/Rent-prices-Seattle-over-the-last-year-17049848.php
GIST	<p>Rent prices in Seattle are up nearly 19% since this time last year, dwarfing the average rates at which rent prices rose in Washington state — 17.8% — and across the United States — 17.1% — during that same time period.</p> <p>That finding comes from Apartment List's latest report about rent prices in the Seattle metro area. The report also found that prices in the city increased by 1% over the past month. That marks the second month in a row in which rent prices have increased in Seattle after declining slightly in January, the report said.</p> <p>Right now, the median monthly rent price for a one-bedroom apartment in Seattle is \$1,681. The median rent for a two-bedroom is \$2,097. While those prices probably seem high, they're actually some of the more affordable prices in the Seattle metro area.</p> <p>The average rent for one- and two-bedroom apartments in Woodinville are \$2,490 and \$2,810, respectively. In Bellevue, those figures are \$2,400 and \$2,570. In Redmond, they're \$2,280 and \$2,550. In Kirkland, they're \$2,090 and \$2,430.</p> <p>Each of those cities has seen whopping, double-digit year-over-year increases in rent prices: Woodinville (20.1%), Bellevue (20.9%), Redmond (17.7%) Kirkland (14.8%). In fact, all 13 Seattle metro area cities named on the Apartment List report saw rents increase over the past year.</p> <p>The same is true for month-over-month increases, with the exception of Tacoma. There, rent prices actually decreased by 0.2% over the past month. The median price of one- and two-bedroom apartments in Tacoma are \$1,220 and \$1,600, respectively.</p> <p>Tacoma also had the smallest year-over-year increase in rent prices: 9.1%. To the south, rent prices in Lakewood saw the smallest month-over-month increase. There, the price for one- and two-bedroom apartments grew 0.2% during the past month, to \$1,170 and \$1,540, respectively.</p> <p>The Seattle metro area is not alone in skyrocketing rent prices, according to the report. In New York City, rent prices grew 33.3% over the past year. In Phoenix and Austin, rent prices rose 25.4% and 22.6%, respectively, during the same time.</p> <p>The report doesn't explain why rent prices have increased dramatically, but national experts say there are likely several reasons for this. Those include a lack of supply coupled with booming demand; home prices being high, which keeps would-be buyers in the rental market; an influx of wealthy renters; and measures that kept prices low during the coronavirus pandemic, such as rent freezes, are expiring as the country attempts to get back to pre-pandemic life.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/01 Steps to take now to prepare for quake
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/pacific-nw-magazine/steps-to-take-now-to-prepare-for-the-coming-quake/
GIST	<p>SIMPLE STEPS YOU can take right away to prepare for an earthquake:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Strap your hot water heater to a wall. Straps made for this are widely available and easy to install.● Also secure other large items that could topple and cause injury, such as refrigerators, dressers, bureaus, bookcases, shelves or televisions. Many of these items come with brackets, but you'll need straps to secure them to walls.● Secure small items and pictures on the wall. Museum putty can be used to help keep pictures hanging in place.● Speaking of pictures on the wall: To hang, use two wires and one nail per picture/painting. One wire on the picture, from one corner to the other. Wrap the second wire around the nail AND the first wire. When

the shaking starts, pictures will jump off their nails but will not fall to the ground and potentially cause more broken glass.

- If something heavy is hanging above your bed, move it. And while you're at it, look around for other potentially injurious or deadly falling objects that can be moved lower.
- Keep things around that might come in handy, such as flashlights and batteries, basic first aid supplies, medications, toiletries and iodine for purifying water. Better yet, store water. And food, too. It should be canned food, or food that will keep for a long time. And it should be food that you actually like, and will eat. Storing food for pets is a good idea, too. Don't forget medicines, other things you use on a daily basis and cash (if the power is out, credit cards and ATMs won't work).
- Keep a pair of hard-soled, closed-toe shoes or boots under the bed, along with socks and a flashlight, to avoid a badly cut foot because of broken glass or fallen objects. Injured feet are common after a disaster. Also keep a jacket nearby.
- Have a supply of extra batteries, phone chargers and a battery-operated radio.
- If your house isn't bolted to its foundation, put the bolts in. If you rent, ask your landlord to do it.
- If you don't have space to store supplies, gather them with neighbors or friends and store in a central location that can be reached easily. Items can be gathered over time. Red Cross has a good list, broken down by weeks so you can purchase items gradually.
- Be ready to get creative. It's possible there will be no running water. A bucket, garbage bag, kitty litter and a Styrofoam pool noodle can provide a makeshift toilet seat. Kitty litter is great for many purposes, including helping vehicles stuck in mud or ice, and for absorbing liquid.

There's more you can do. Here are some resources:

- **City of Seattle, Emergency Management:** seattle.gov/emergency-management/hazards/earthquake.
- **King County, Emergency Management:** The site includes King County's "Disaster Danny" videos at kingcounty.gov/depts/emergency-management/hazards/earthquake.aspx.
- Also, King County, Emergency Management, in partnership with Seattle's Office of Emergency Management and the University of Montana, maintains a website at hazardready.org/seattle/en.
- King County, Emergency Management advises people to be "2 weeks ready" with supplies. Another site, makeitthrough.org, focuses on preparedness for the public.
- King County encourages people/schools/businesses to participate in the yearly Great Shakeout drill — this year it will be on Oct. 21 at 10:21 a.m. People can take this time to "drop, cover and hold on" and practice their plans on what they would do if a real earthquake hit. More information at shakeout.org/washington.
- **AlertSeattle:** Sign up for emergency alerts at alert.seattle.gov.
- **Alert King County:** Emergency notification is available at kingcounty.gov/depts/emergency-management/alert-king-county.aspx.
- **ShakeAlert:** An earthquake early warning system for the West Coast of the United States is at shakealert.org.

For more resources, visit st.news/earthquake.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/01 Absolutely, positive: quake to ravage Seattle
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/pacific-nw-magazine/a-deadly-earthquake-absolutely-positively-will-ravage-seattle-at-some-point-heres-how-to-survive-it/
GIST	<p>In 2015, The New Yorker published an article asserting that an earthquake in our part of North America — the inevitable big one — “will spell the worst natural disaster in the history of the continent.” This was something people here didn't want to think about.</p> <p>Yet still The New Yorker arrived, bearing the news that, when the shaking begins, “Anything indoors and unsecured will lurch across the floor or come crashing down. ... Houses that are not bolted to their foundations will slide off. ... Something on the order of a million buildings — more than 3,000 of them schools — will collapse or be compromised. ... So will half of all highway bridges ... two-thirds of railways and airports; also one-third of all fire stations, half of all police stations and two-thirds of all hospitals. ... [The] quake will set off landslides throughout the region. ... The sloshing, sliding and</p>

shaking will trigger fires, flooding, pipe failures, dam breaches and hazardous-material spills. Then the wave will arrive, and the real destruction will begin.”

The subject of my story is also an earthquake. My region of concern, though, is smaller than The New Yorker’s, which focused on a quake that will ravage a sizable portion of the coastal Northwest. I’m focused on one that will limit itself to ravaging just Seattle and environs.

Trigger warning. I’m about to go into detail about things that might scare people in the Seattle area. Why would I do that? Because a lot of us here read The New Yorker article and then did little or nothing to prepare for an earthquake. That probably will happen in the aftermath of this article, too. Hopefully, though, not for everyone who reads it.

SOME BACKGROUND.

The world as we know it, while it might appear to be unbroken and continuous, is in fact divided into pieces. Geologists call these pieces “plates,” but for me it’s of no use imagining them that way, because it’s around 60 miles from the bottom to the top of one. They’re more like blocks.

The block Seattle sits on — the North American block — terminates to the east in the mid-Atlantic Ocean and to the west less than 150 miles off our coast. Just west of it is the much smaller Juan de Fuca block. By all accounts, these blocks are impelled by unappeasable forces toward one another. They’re in each other’s way, so something has to give — and does give, recurrently. The New Yorker article describes what will happen the next time something gives at these plates. It illuminates what it means for all hell to break loose because of it.

That said, if you live in Seattle, you can take solace from the fact that the precipitating events will occur about 175 miles to the west and many miles beneath the surface — in other words, far enough away to mitigate their worst effects. Seattle’s hell will not include as much violent shaking — or tsunami inundation — as will occur on the Washington and Oregon coasts. Still, when the shaking is over and the sea returns to normal, Seattle will be in a bad way.

But that’s The New Yorker quake — a regional cataclysm that will include our city as it lays waste to many thousands of square miles. The one I’m failing, so far, to write about, when it occurs — as it must — will probably be called the Seattle Quake, or the Great Seattle Quake, for an obvious reason.

BETWEEN 2012 AND NOW, the 10 largest earthquakes in the world all have been of The New Yorker variety, otherwise known as megathrust quakes. In every case, the precipitating events occurred deep beneath a seafloor. One quake started under the Indian Ocean, and one under the Sea of Okhotsk. The other eight all started under the Pacific Ocean. The combined death toll from these 10 quakes was 137. If that doesn’t seem low to you, consider that the biggest earthquake of 2011 — also a megathrust — killed almost 20,000 people.

Why was one quake so much deadlier than the others? The 10 largest quakes of the past 10 years happened so far from land, both vertically and horizontally, that by the time their effects reached inhabited areas, they were muted enough not to kill in large numbers. As for the 2011 quake — sometimes called the Great East Japan Earthquake — it too started far from land, but its effects included a devastating tsunami. When a quake begins where the Earth’s blocks are in confrontation, its capacity to kill greatly hinges on this element: a tsunami. If the quake doesn’t generate a significant one, it probably causes few casualties. If it does generate a significant tsunami, the death count can be high. That’s what happened in 2004, when a quake starting deep beneath the Indian Ocean killed more than 225,000 people in 14 countries.

Seattleites can feel confident that when the next megathrust quake happens in the coastal Northwest, Puget Sound isn’t going to be roiled the way the Pacific was roiled by the Great East Japan or Indian Ocean earthquakes. There will be plenty of suffering, and certainly some deaths, but no apocalyptic lethality.

I DON’T WANT to undermine the warning The New Yorker gave us. The inevitable megathrust quake it describes is worthy of our anxiety, not just because of the horrors it will entail but also because it could

happen soon. Quakes of this sort occur in our region on average every 500 years. The last one happened 322 years ago, and the one before that about 1,300 years ago. You might choose to focus on the fact that about 1,000 years passed between the two, but only if you're an insistent cup-half-full person. For everybody else, it might be chastening to hear that the interval between the quake of 1,300 years ago and the one before it was around 320 years.

It should be said these megathrust quakes generally rate very high on the Richter scale, which has been replaced by the "moment magnitude" scale. Scales like these are meant to say something about the relative strength and intensity of earthquakes, and for geologists, they do so usefully. For the rest of us, though, the scales can be misleading in a way that can have consequences.

News reports on earthquakes emphasize magnitude. Insistently, they call our attention to the scale of what happened. Alongside descriptions of death and destruction, they make use of numbers — how many dead, how many injured, how many homeless, how many buildings brought to the ground. Looming over all of that stands a one-digit whole number followed by a decimal, like 9.2 or 6.2. Those are moment magnitude scale numbers.

The moment magnitude scale suggests phenomena that get more intense by steady, equal degrees, one-tenth of a whole number at a time. In other words, it suggests that a 9.2 earthquake would be about a third more intense than a 6.2. That isn't how it is, though, because the moment magnitude scale is logarithmic. A 9.2 is in fact many thousands of times more intense than a 6.2.

If that were all there was to it, it might not matter much. We would misunderstand the meaning of numbers in a way that did us little harm. Unfortunately, though, there's a more troubling problem. Scale numbers ignore a quake's depth and location, which turn out to have very much to say about its potential for destruction

Again, the next major megathrust quake here will originate well under the Pacific seafloor. The next major quake in what is known as the Seattle Fault Zone, though, will originate directly under our city at a shallow depth. The megathrust quake will be of the 9 variety; the Seattle quake will be more like a 7. Don't be comforted by your take on those scale figures (even though it's true that, if you do the math, a 9.0 turns out to be more than 1,000 times more powerful than a 7.0). A 7.0 quake in 2010 killed more than 300,000 people in Haiti. That one originated 6 miles below the surface. Its epicenter was 16 miles from Port-au-Prince, a city about Seattle's size.

THESE THINGS AREN'T easy to think about rationally. Most of us, because we prefer certain outcomes, have trained our brains to lead us to them. Our conclusions come first — for example, "No major earthquake will happen during my lifetime" — followed by arguments in support. Willfully, then, we confirm our biases. After that, we bury our heads in the sand.

The odds of a 9.0 quake impacting the coastal Pacific Northwest over the next 50 years is said, by seismologists, to be about 14%. Maybe you'll take those odds and bet against it happening. They're not terrible, after all: about the same that an NFL kicker will miss a 37-yard field goal. On the other hand, about the same odds — 15% (as estimated by The New York Times on Election Day morning, 2016) — were attached to a Donald Trump triumph over Hillary Clinton.

As for the Seattle Fault Zone, the odds are 5% for a 6.5 quake in the next 50 years. You might take those odds, too, and bet against it happening. And by betting against it, I mean not preparing for it. Every time an earthquake happens, most people are surprised.

GEOLOGY ONCE MORE.

The Juan de Fuca block rotates in the manner of a cylinder. As it turns eastward on its downward arc, it tries to grind through the neighboring North American block. The blocks' zone of interpenetration lies beneath the Cascade Range, where intense pressures produce volcanic peaks like St. Helens, Baker and Rainier. More to the point, though, the leading edge of the North American block, driven west, carves material off the sinking Juan de Fuca block and piles it as rubble. This is where we live in Western

Washington — on top of Juan de Fuca block rubble, intermingled with a momentous amount of material that has been sliding off the North American block for a long time, all of it now compressed nearly solid and subject to its own set of earthquake-causing forces.

The Seattle Fault Zone lies within this admixture and, like what underlies it, is composed of blocks pressing against each other. About 40 miles from east to west and 5 miles from north to south, it includes a major fracture running just south of downtown, and another fracture that's under a succession of North Seattle neighborhoods. The zone lies at a depth of 2 to 4 miles, and is prone to earthquakes like the one in Haiti, or like the 6.9 earthquake in Kobe, Japan, in 1995, that killed thousands of people and did more than \$100 billion worth of damage. As it turns out, geologic circumstances under Seattle are much like those under Kobe.

What happened in Kobe was catastrophic. Of the approximately 6,400 people who perished in the city and its environs, at least 80% died trapped in rubble. Some people were crushed, some suffocated and some died in firestorms. Fortunately, it was before 6 a.m. when the shaking started, so most places of work were empty. That said, 240,000 homes were damaged, and more than 40,000 people were injured. Hospitals were overrun. It was January; the weather was freezing. Amid this, about 300,000 people were suddenly homeless. I won't continue in this vein, but I will say that all of it happened in a country widely considered state-of-the-art when it comes to earthquake preparedness. And that the quake's epicenter was 12.5 miles from the city, and 10 miles beneath the surface.

SEATTLE FAULT ZONE quakes begin as ruptures. At some point along one of its faults or fractures — by which I mean a seam where two blocks shove against each other — the pressure of opposition becomes too great, and one or both blocks suddenly move. When that happens, the energy that's unleashed spreads in all directions, but most dramatically along the fault itself, which tears.

It might help to imagine two blocks meeting on a diagonal line: When the fault ruptures, two things can happen. One of the blocks can climb. Or one can climb while the other sinks.

A 2005 model for a 6.7 Seattle Fault Zone quake, made by the Earthquake Engineering Research Institute, predicts ground rupture of about 6 vertical feet from Harbor Island to Issaquah. Meaning, I guess, that if you survive the shaking, and can figure out how to get across Lake Washington, you could walk 15 miles or so along the wall of a freshly opened scarp.

There's more. Power, water, sewer and gas lines will be severed, as will the cables and wires that make internet connections possible. Our hospitals will be overrun, and our grocery stores will empty. I'll add more: firestorms, hazardous material spills, downed bridges, landslides by the thousands. I agree with you — I sound like The New Yorker here.

In the aftermath of its article, The New Yorker heard from readers in our region who were interested in preparing for the next megathrust quake. To its credit, it followed up that same month with an article called "How To Stay Safe When the Big One Comes," which ended, "Take some basic steps to protect yourself, work to draw attention to those issues that demand collective action — do that, and you need not be overly scared either."

I would add only that it makes sense to take steps now, because by putting them off you increase the risk that your motivation will fade to nothing. [We have a list](#) of some things you might do, along with practical advice and useful links that can help you take action.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/01 Judge: no SEALs training in state parks
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/judge-navy-seals-cant-use-washington-parks-training/FMFE3HRP2VGNZCF7W7PDOXJUJQ/
GIST	OLYMPIA, Wash. — A judge has ruled that the Navy SEALs won't be able to use Washington State Parks as training grounds.

In January 2021, the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission voted 4-3 to approve the Navy's proposal to use up to 28 parks for training purposes for the elite units, where SEALs would emerge from the water under the cover of darkness and disappear into the environment.

The Northwest News Network reports the decision rankled many recreationalists, who said during public comments they would avoid these areas for fear that SEALs would watch them without the knowledge or consent of visitors.

On Friday, Thurston County Superior Court Judge James Dixon said the commission's decision was illegal and outside its purview, which includes the protection and enhancement of parks.

In addition, Dixon ruled the commission violated the State Environmental Policy Act by not considering fully how the trainings could deter visitors.

Opponents of the decision often said the presence of out-of-sight SEAL trainees would incite a "creepiness factor," removing a sense of calm often found in nature.

Dixon said he couldn't come up with a better legal term than that.

"It is creepy," he said.

In earlier public hearings, Navy officials said Washington's natural landscapes provide critical cold water training for SEALs. Washington's coastlines and currents pose challenges to SEAL trainees that are difficult to find elsewhere, said Warrant Officer Esteban Alvarado at a Nov. 19, 2020, public meeting, calling the region a critical component in training exercises.

The judge's decision could be appealed.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/01 Alaska Air cancels flights as pilots picket
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/business/alaska-airlines-cancels-64-friday-flights-as-pilots-picket-for-better-contracts
GIST	<p>SEATAC, Wash. — As Alaska Airlines pilots picketed in several cities along the west coast, more than 70 of the airline's flights scheduled for Friday at Sea-Tac International Airport had been canceled as Friday afternoon, according to flightaware.com. More than 120 of the airline's flights were cancelled across its system, the airline reported. The cancellations were largely due to a shortage of pilots.</p> <p>The cancellations came as pilots from Alaska Airlines held informational pickets in SeaTac over stalled contract negotiations with the airline. Similar pickets were held in Anchorage, Portland, San Francisco and Los Angeles.</p> <p>The two sides are scheduled to meet with a federal mediator again on Tuesday, the pilots' union told KOMO News.</p> <p>The airline and the pilots' union - the Air Line Pilots Association - have been locked in negotiations for since the summer of 2019, including a mutual pause for approximately a year due to the pandemic.</p> <p>The union says Alaska Airlines didn't prepare for an upswing in travel or take steps to make sure it retained pilots.</p> <p>Alaska Airlines says a new pilot contract remains a top priority.</p> <p>"It's also vital for Alaska Airlines to negotiate a deal that allows us to maintain growth and profitability for a strong future," the company said in a statement provided to KOMO News.</p>

"We've put a package on the table that's competitive and addresses the issues most important to our pilots. It's a significant financial investment in our pilot group while recognizing that we are still working to recover from \$2.3 billion in losses from the COVID-19 pandemic. We are eager to conclude negotiations quickly so our pilots can enjoy these new benefits as soon as possible," said Jenny Wetzel, vice president of labor relations for Alaska Airlines.

Pilots say they want better pay, more flexible schedules, and better job security.

"This is actually an issue of attracting and retaining pilots," said Will McQuillen, Chairman of Alaska Master Executive Council, Air Line Pilots Association International. "Attrition is at record levels for this airline right now. Last year was a record year. This year we've already surpassed that number in just the first 3 months of the year. And pilots right now with the major airlines hiring between 8,000-10,000 pilots this year alone – pilots have their opportunities ahead of them."

"The cancellations are the result of the attrition. And management was actually pretty candid with us that they faced a shortage going into April. And if that shortage wasn't addressed, that they would face flight cancellations," McQuillen added.

Alaska Airlines says more flight cancellations are possible this weekend.

The Air Line Pilots Association, International (ALPA) released a statement Friday morning.

"Alaska Airlines received a \$2.3 billion bailout from American taxpayers during the pandemic to weather the economic downturn, retain its workforce, and be ready to take advantage of the recovery we are now experiencing," the statement says. "It has one of the strongest balance sheets with industry-leading profit margins and came out of the pandemic with less net debt than before it.

"Yet, despite all of this, Alaska Airlines failed to properly plan for increased travel demand and take the steps necessary to ensure it attracted and retained pilots. In fact, just this week, ALPA met with two corporate vice presidents who made clear that they have failed to adequately retain and staff up to meet a predictable return to flying.

"Now, they're trying to distract the public from their mismanagement and blame the pilots who helped save their company. Pilot leaders have been warning for years that pilots will choose to fly for other airlines due to an inadequate contract that will only exacerbate existing staffing challenges.

"Hundreds of Alaska pilots will be exercising their lawful right to conduct non-disruptive informational picketing today in five cities around the country to highlight Alaska's strong financial position and urge the company to get serious about concluding a contract. Alaska pilots are more than ready."

The following statement came from Alaska Airlines in response to the picketing earlier in the morning on Friday:

We understand how important it is to our pilots to secure a new contract. As the negotiations continue, we respect their right to engage in lawfully protected activities to voice their concerns.

We're committed to reaching a collective bargaining agreement that recognizes the contributions of our pilots and supports them with increased pay, job security and greater work flexibility – key issues important to them.

It's also vital for Alaska Airlines to negotiate a deal that allows us to maintain growth and profitability for a strong future. It's crucial we continue to provide all of our employees with competitive pay and benefits as we hire more people, invest in new planes and fly our guests to new destinations. We believe the goals of the company and the goals of our pilots complement each other.

"A new pilot contract remains atop priority for Alaska," said Jenny Wetzel, vice president of labor relations for Alaska Airlines. "We've put a package on the table that's competitive and addresses the issues most important to our pilots. It's a significant financial investment in our pilot group while recognizing that we are still working to recover from \$2.3 billion in losses from the COVID-19 pandemic. We are eager to conclude negotiations quickly so our pilots can enjoy these new benefits as soon as possible."

In support of our pilots, we recently presented the union with a comprehensive proposal. Among the highlights:

We're offering a top of scale wage of \$280 per hour for captains and a market wage adjustment a year after the contract is ratified to keep our pilots' wages competitive with their peers at other airlines. For reference, an Alaska captain's average salary is currently \$341,000 per year. For first officers, we've proposed a rate of \$100 per hour, which would be the #1 new hire rate in the nation.

We're ready to increase the job security of our pilots: Any aircraft operated by Alaska Air Group over 76 seats will be flown by Alaska's seniority list pilots.

We'd add significant flexibility on how our pilots can set their schedules along with additional support for our reserve pilots. Our pilots currently work 16 days a month on average.

We've been in talks with the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA) for a new agreement since the summer of 2019, with a mutual pause in talks for about a year as the industry weathered the pandemic. As a normal part of the process, we filed for mediation with the National Mediation Board in October 2021 to help move the process forward and facilitate an agreement. We look forward to making further progress at our next mediation session scheduled for later this month.

There are some flight cancellations connected to a shortage of pilots which has created operational challenges. We notified our guests whose flights have been impacted and apologize for the inconvenience. We're working as quickly as possible to make things right and get them to their destinations.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/01 NHTSA: new vehicles 40mpg avg by 2026
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/new-vehicles-much-average-40-mpg-by-2026-new-us-standards
GIST	<p>DETROIT (AP) - New vehicles sold in the United States will have to travel an average of at least 40 miles per gallon of gasoline in 2026, up from about 28 mpg, under new federal rules unveiled Friday.</p> <p>The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said its fuel economy requirements will undo a rollback of standards enacted under President Donald Trump. The new requirements increase gas mileage by 8% per year for model years 2024 and 2025 and 10% in the 2026 model year.</p> <p>Agency officials say the requirements are the maximum that the industry can achieve over the time period and will reduce gasoline consumption by more than 220 billion gallons over the life of vehicles, compared with the Trump standards.</p> <p>Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, whose department includes the NHTSA, said the rules also will help strengthen national security by making the country less dependent on foreign oil and less vulnerable to volatile gasoline prices. Gasoline nationwide has spiked to an average of more than \$4.22 per gallon, with much of the increase coming since Russia, a major oil producer, invaded Ukraine in late February. It cost \$2.88 per gallon just a year ago, according to AAA.</p> <p>Gas prices also have helped to fuel inflation to a 40-year high, eating up household budgets and hitting President Joe Biden's approval ratings.</p> <p>"Transportation is the second-largest cost for American families, only behind housing," Buttigieg said. The new standards, he said, will help keep the U.S. more secure and preserve "the freedom of our country to</p>

chart its future without being subject to other countries and to the decisions that are being made in the boardrooms of energy companies."

But auto dealers say more stringent requirements drive up prices and push people out of an already expensive new-car market.

Trump's administration rolled back fuel economy standards, allowing them to rise 1.5% per year, which environmental groups said was inadequate to limit planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions that fuel climate change. The standards had been rising about 5% per year previously.

But the new standards won't immediately match those adopted through 2025 under President Barack Obama. NHTSA officials said they will equal the Obama standards by 2025 and slightly exceed them for the 2026 model year.

The Obama-era standards automatically adjusted for changes in the type of vehicles people are buying. When they were enacted in 2012, 51% of new vehicle sales were cars and 49% SUVs and trucks. Last year, 77% of new vehicle sales were SUVs and trucks, which generally are less efficient than cars.

Some environmental groups said the new requirements from NHTSA under Biden don't go far enough to fight global warming. Others supported the new standards as a big step toward reducing emissions.

"Climate change has gotten much worse, but these rules only require automakers to reduce gas-guzzling slightly more than they agreed to cut nine years ago," said Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Transport Center at the Center for Biological Diversity.

He said the final rule is about 2 mpg short of the strongest alternative that NHTSA considered.

Officials said that under the new standards, owners would save about \$1,400 in gasoline costs during the lifetime of a 2029 model year vehicle. Carbon dioxide emissions would drop by 2.5 billion metric tons by 2050 under the standards, the NHTSA said.

Automakers are investing billions of dollars to develop and build electric vehicles but say government support is needed to get people to buy them. The companies want government tax credits to reduce prices as well as more money for EV charging stations to ease anxiety over running out of juice.

Stellantis, formerly Fiat Chrysler, said Friday it's investing \$35 billion on electric and hybrid vehicles and to become carbon neutral by 2038. "These aims are critical to a sustainable future, and are more likely to be realized with government support for a widespread EV recharging network, point-of-sale EV purchase incentives, and inducements to expand electric-vehicle manufacturing in the U.S.," the company said in a statement.

The NHTSA sets fuel economy requirements, while the Environmental Protection Agency develops limits on greenhouse gas emissions. NHTSA officials said their requirements nearly match rules adopted in December by the EPA, so automakers don't have to comply with two rules.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/01 WA law: phase out gas cars by 2030
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/washington-state-to-phase-out-sales-of-gas-powered-cars-by-2030
GIST	OLYMPIA, Wash. - Gov. Jay Inslee signed into law last month a bill that sets a date of 2030 for all new cars registered in Washington state to be electric. According to the bill , this applies to all vehicles of the model year 2030 or later that are sold, purchased or registered in the state.

	<p>The measure, known as Clean Cars 2030, is part of the nearly \$17 billion "Move Ahead Washington" transportation package, which will allow funding for clean transportation options.</p> <p>"On or before December 31, 2023, the interagency electric 22 vehicle coordinating council created in section 428 of this act shall 23 complete a scoping plan for achieving the 2030 target," the bill stated.</p> <p>In a news release, Clean Cars 2030 will spur public and private investment in electric vehicles and electric charging infrastructure, and will also help Washingtonians save money on vehicle fuel and maintenance while enjoying cleaner air and water.</p> <p>"Clean Cars 2030 outlines a clear path forward for the future of the electric vehicle transition in our state," said Senator Marko Liias. "This part of our Move Ahead Washington plan will create a timeline with the data, tools, and guidelines that every sector from governments to businesses can plan for with confidence. This is a monumental step towards reducing our carbon emissions in Washington, and I'm proud that Washington is once again a leader in addressing the climate crisis."</p>
Return to Top	

Cyber Awareness

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	04/03 Russian Orthodox church emails hacked
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/russian-hackers-church-emails/2022/04/03/id/1064091/
GIST	<p>The charity wing of the Russian Orthodox Church has had its emails hacked, according to a pro-Ukraine social media network.</p> <p>"#OpRussia: Hackers leaked 15GB of data stolen from the Russian Orthodox Church's charitable wing & released roughly 57,500 emails via #DDoSecrets," Anonymous TV's Twitter account reported Friday night.</p> <p>"#DDoSecrets noted that due to the nature of the data, at this time it is only being offered to journalists & researchers. #Anonymous."</p> <p>The hacking of a charity account could release sensitive financial and private information of donors – or potentially expose Ukraine sympathizers to retaliation by the Kremlin.</p> <p>"What secrets can benefactors have? All over the world it is accepted that such funds and structures operate openly and publish the structures of both their income and their expenses," deacon Andrei Kuraev wrote on an internet blog. "Or is the patriarchate here the main beneficiary?"</p> <p>This is not the first time churches have been the target of hacking in the decades-long standoff between Ukraine and Russia, as Ukraine has sought religious independence from its former Soviet Union roots.</p> <p>"Kyiv is Jerusalem for the Russian Orthodox people," Daniel Payne, a researcher on the board of the J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies at Baylor University in Texas, told the AP in 2018. "That's where the sacred relics, monasteries, churches are."</p> <p>"It's sacred to the people, and to Russian identity."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/01 Phishing campaign targets election officials
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/cybersecurity/cyber-actors-target-u-s-election-officials-with-invoice-themed-phishing-campaign-to-harvest-credentials/
GIST	The FBI is warning US election and other state and local government officials about invoicethemed phishing emails that could be used to harvest officials' login credentials. If successful, this activity may

provide cyber actors with sustained, undetected access to a victim's systems. As of October 2021, US election officials in at least nine states received invoice-themed phishing emails containing links to websites intended to steal login credentials. These emails shared similar attachment files, used compromised email addresses, and were sent close in time, suggesting a concerted effort to target US election officials.

The FBI judges cyber actors will likely continue or increase their targeting of US election officials with phishing campaigns in the lead-up to the 2022 US midterm elections. Proactive monitoring of election infrastructure (including official email accounts) and communication between FBI and its state, local, territorial, and tribal partners about this type of activity will provide opportunities to mitigate instances of credential harvesting and compromise, identify potential targets and information sought by threat actors, and identify threat actors. This assessment is based on reports of phishing attacks that occurred in October 2021 and had the characteristics of a coordinated, ongoing effort to target US election officials.

- On 5 October 2021, unidentified cyber actors targeted US election officials in at least nine states, and representatives of the National Association of Secretaries of State, with phishing emails. These emails originated from at least two email addresses with the same attachment titled, "INVOICE INQUIRY.PDF," which redirected users to a credential harvesting website. One of the email addresses sending the phishing emails was a compromised US government official's email account.
- On 18 October 2021, cyber actors used two email addresses, purportedly from US businesses, to send phishing emails to county election employees. Both emails contained Microsoft Word document attachments regarding invoices, which redirected users to unidentified online credential harvesting websites.
- On 19 October 2021, cyber actors used an email address, purportedly from a US business, to send a phishing email containing fake invoices to an election official. The emails contained an attached Microsoft Word document titled, "Current Invoice and Payments for report."

[Return to Top](#)

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HEADLINE	04/04 Mirai botnet variant: Beastmode
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/04/beastmode-ddos-botnet-exploiting-new.html
GIST	<p>A variant of the Mirai botnet called Beastmode has been observed adopting newly disclosed vulnerabilities in TOTOLINK routers between February and March 2022 to infect unpatched devices and expand its reach potentially.</p> <p>"The Beastmode (aka B3astmode) Mirai-based DDoS campaign has aggressively updated its arsenal of exploits," Fortinet's FortiGuard Labs Research team said. "Five new exploits were added within a month, with three targeting various models of TOTOLINK routers."</p> <p>The list of exploited vulnerabilities in TOTOLINK routers is as follows -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• CVE-2022-26210 (CVSS score: 9.8) - A command injection vulnerability that could be exploited to gain arbitrary code execution• CVE-2022-26186 (CVSS score: 9.8) - A command injection vulnerability affecting TOTOLINK N600R and A7100RU routers, and• CVE-2022-25075 to CVE-2022-25084 (CVSS scores: 9.8) - A command injection vulnerability impacting multiple TOTOLINK routers, leading to code execution <p>The other exploits targeted by Beastmode include flaws in TP-Link Tapo C200 IP camera (CVE-2021-4045, CVSS score: 9.8), Huawei HG532 routers (CVE-2017-17215, CVSS score: 8.8), video surveillance solutions from NUUO and Netgear (CVE-2016-5674, CVSS score: 9.8), and discontinued D-Link products (CVE-2021-45382, CVSS score: 9.8).</p> <p>To prevent affected models from being taken over the botnet, users are strongly recommended to update their devices to the latest firmware.</p>

	"Even though the original Mirai author was arrested in fall 2018, [the latest campaign] highlights how threat actors, such as those behind the Beastmode campaign, continue to rapidly incorporate newly published exploit code to infect unpatched devices using the Mirai malware," the researchers said.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/04 BlackGuard infostealer malware
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/04/experts-shed-light-on-blackguard.html
GIST	<p>A previously undocumented "sophisticated" information-stealing malware named BlackGuard is being advertised for sale on Russian underground forums for a monthly subscription of \$200.</p> <p>"BlackGuard has the capability to steal all types of information related to Crypto wallets, VPN, Messengers, FTP credentials, saved browser credentials, and email clients," Zscaler ThreatLabz researchers Mitesh Wani and Kaivalya Khursale said in a report published last week.</p> <p>Also sold for a lifetime price of \$700, BlackGuard is designed as a .NET-based malware that's actively under development, boasting of a number of anti-analysis, anti-debugging, and anti-evasion features that allows it to kill processes related to antivirus engines and bypass string-based detection.</p> <p>What's more, it checks the IP address of the infected devices by sending a request to the domain "https://ipwhois[.]japp/xml/," and exit itself if the country is one among the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).</p> <p>BlackGuard's extensive functionality means it can amass information stored in browsers, such as passwords, cookies, autofill data, browsing history, 17 different cold cryptocurrency wallets, and as many as six messaging apps, including Telegram, Signal, Tox, Element, Pidgin, and Discord.</p> <p>In addition, the malware targets 21 crypto wallet extensions installed in Chrome and Edge browsers, and three VPN apps NordVPN, OpenVPN, and ProtonVPN, the results of which are subsequently compressed into a ZIP archive and exfiltrated to a remote server.</p> <p>The findings come as Morphisec disclosed details of another infostealer family called Mars that's been observed leveraging fraudulent Google Ads for well-known software like OpenOffice to distribute the malware.</p> <p>"While applications of BlackGuard are not as broad as other stealers, BlackGuard is a growing threat as it continues to be improved and is developing a strong reputation in the underground community," the researchers said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/01 Experts warn: don't relax on Log4j
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/experts-warn-defenders-dont-relax-log4j
GIST	<p>It's been four months since the Log4j issue exploded onto the internet. All the major software vendors affected by it have by now released patches – but even where companies have patched, it would be wrong to relax.</p> <p>Log4j is the name of a logging software library used by many different applications. It has also become the name of an attack using the Log4j library (the attack is also known as Log4Shell). The attack is not so much a vulnerability but the manipulation of a feature of the library – and because 'exploitation' is merely the effect of using this feature in a malicious manner, widescale exploitation began within 48 hours of the possibility becoming public knowledge.</p> <p>All that is required by an attacker is getting the log to contain a specific text message. If the library has internet access, that message effectively beacons out to a server controlled by the attacker, and the attacker can gain access.</p>

There are two solutions: one is waiting for software vendors to release patches and implementing those patches as quickly as possible; and the other is to use basic cyber resilience (in this case blocking and tackling, or ‘default deny’ on firewalls) to prevent Log4j beaconing out to the malicious server. The problem is that many companies do not have default deny properly implemented, while in the best patching scenario there was most likely a delay of several weeks before the patch was tested, delivered and implemented.

For example, VMware released its first patch for Horizon in December 2021, and has updated this several times. However, in late January 2022, the company still felt it necessary to issue an alert urging customers to implement the patch.

“Customers who have not applied either the patch or the latest workaround provided in VMware’s security advisory are at risk of being compromised—or may have already been compromised—by threat actors...” the company said in a critical-level advisory.

Patching or blocking outgoing internet communications solves Log4j – but the fact remains that many companies were exposed during a period of widespread malicious exploitation, and could have been compromised during this time.

David Wolpoff, CTO and cofounder at Randori, explains the implications: “The good news about log4j being a vulnerability in a logging system,” he told SecurityWeek, “means that there’s a good chance that some evidence exists of attempts at or actual exploitation within those logs. Unfortunately, once a system is exploited, the data on that system becomes less trustable – it’s not uncommon for attackers to tamper with logs or try to cover-up activities.”

It is consequently feasible for an attacker to have gained access and covered his tracks before the vulnerability was cut off through blocking outgoing communications or implementing patches. Even for companies who are now safe, it is possible that they may already be compromised.

Randori provides a continuous red team platform. It understands how hackers think, and therefore how they choose their targets. It has applied this knowledge to the Log4j threat scenario to highlight the areas that are most attractive to hackers and therefore should be of most concern to defenders. In a report titled Top Ten Most Attackable Log4j Affected Applications (PDF), it provides two lists: the most populous applications, and the most attractive applications.

The most intriguing types of software from an attacker’s perspective are those that are 100% confirmed to be vulnerable to Log4j and provide additional ‘downstream’ access. “This includes factors,” notes the report, “such as whether the application will be hospitable to them once exploited (known as the post exploitation environment), and what other components will be accessible (known as reachable surface area) once hacked.”

Based on this analysis, Randori concludes that VMware Horizon (the third most populous vulnerable application) is the top most attractive target. It is followed by Jamf and Mobiliron.

Any company that has not yet patched their vulnerable applications should do so as quickly as possible, perhaps guided in urgency by this list. That will protect them from future Log4j exploits – but will not guarantee that they haven’t already been compromised. It would be good practice for these companies to assume they have been compromised, and to be extra vigilant for any sign of an intruder. There have been indications that backdoors have been dropped and access brokers have taken an interest – so there is no telling from where, when or by whom a current compromise could be turned into a full-blown breach.

The irony of Log4j is that it is a fire that in theory should never have happened. Theory, of course, is different to practice, and there are often very good reasons for theory not to have been put into practice. Nevertheless, standard good security practices would have stopped the Log4j feature becoming a widespread threat vector.

“The full attack requires a couple of round trips in and out of the attacked environment,” Wolpoff told SecurityWeek. “Old school 'default deny' in the firewall stops the progress of these round trips. If the app doesn't need to talk to the internet, you don't let it talk to the internet.”

He continued, “In the case of Log4j, in order to exploit the condition, an attacker needs to have a log message printed. So, I would need to get some message into the environment where the input would be printed out through the logging system. I send a 'hail Mary' into the environment and the log message gets printed, and the underlying code does a bad thing.

“But in order to access the computer to do something bad, that underlying code needs to call back out to a computer that I control, and retrieve the additional data for my purposes. So, if the initial outbound connection to my computer gets blocked by a firewall set to 'default deny', then the total attack will fail even though the exploitable condition was available and used.”

The Log4j threat is very much present today, even though it is four months old. There are still unpatched systems without default deny. There are other applications that have been developed, perhaps in-house proprietary apps, using the Log4j library. These will never be patched by a third-party provider. And, of course, you may unknowingly already be compromised.

But perhaps the biggest takeaway is that the threat would never happen where the target has implemented good resilience practice – defense in depth including the blocking of out-bound traffic. In many cases, doing so now will not solve Log4j, but may neuter the next internet wide ‘Log4j’. Resilience needs to be built into defenses.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/04 London: 2 teens charged; Lapsus group
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/lapsus-teen-suspects-day-in-court/
GIST	<p>Two British teenagers have been charged with hacking offenses in an ongoing investigation into the infamous Lapsus ransom group.</p> <p>A statement issued on Friday by City of London police detective inspector Michael O’Sullivan noted that the duo would appear in Highbury Magistrates Court the same day.</p> <p>Due to their ages, reporting restrictions are in place, preventing the identification of the 16 and 17-year-old suspects.</p> <p>“Both teenagers have been charged with: three counts of unauthorised access to a computer with intent to impair the reliability of data; one count of fraud by false representation and one count of unauthorized access to a computer with intent to hinder access to data,” the statement noted.</p> <p>“The 16-year-old has also been charged with one count of causing a computer to perform a function to secure unauthorized access to a program.”</p> <p>Although the police did not mention Lapsus by name, a BBC report did, stating that the two youngsters had been released on bail.</p> <p>According to the same report, prosecutor Valerie Benjamin said during the hearing that the case should be tried at a crown court because of its complexity and the large sums of money Lapsus tried to extort from its victims.</p> <p>At the end of March, City of London police said it arrested seven suspects between the ages of 16 and 21 in connection with the group. A report claimed the ringleader was a 16-year-old from Oxford with autism, who went by the online monikers “White” and “Breachbase.”</p>

	<p>The group has a high-profile string of victims to its name, including Samsung, Nvidia, Vodafone, Microsoft and Okta. Despite the arrests, it added another to the list just last week, in the form of an Argentinian software developer known as Globant.</p> <p>Lapsus is claiming to have published a 70GB torrent file featuring source code stolen from the company.</p> <p>It remains to be seen what role, if any, the two UK teens played in the group and whether it has affiliate members around the world, making both attribution and disruption more difficult for investigators</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	04/02 American Express down in outage
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/american-express-down-in-outage-users-report-login-and-payment-issues/
GIST	<p>Yesterday, American Express users across the world including US, UK, and Europe, experienced widespread outages lasting hours. And, the payment services giant advises that some users may continue to experience issues online or over the phone.</p> <p>The issues reported by users included being unable to log in to their Amex accounts, make payments, or get to an Amex customer service representative over the phone.</p> <p>BleepingComputer was able to briefly reproduce issues right before Amex confirmed partially restoring services.</p> <p>Broken two-factor authentication</p> <p>American Express customers around the world were left without the means to make payments, as hours-long outages prevented users from logging into their accounts.</p> <p>The online systems of the payment card services provider went down on Friday, April 1st, and kept malfunctioning for hours, as also observed by BleepingComputer.</p> <p>Amex put up a banner on its homepage that it was "aware that technical difficulties" were affecting phone lines, online account services, and the Amex mobile app.</p> <p>In multiple tests by BleepingComputer, we observed the log-in screen prompted for a "one-time verification code" multiple times; upon every successful log-in attempt—even though we were signing-in from the same device previously used to access the account. The mobile app also exhibited this behavior:</p> <p>As services started coming back up, BleepingComputer was able to get past the two-factor code screen after successful authentication only to land on a "not found" page, where the Dashboard should be.</p> <p>Technologist Jacob Rothstein suspected whether the issues were connected to Amex's recently introduced "one login for all accounts" feature. The new feature integration would enable customers to access both Savings accounts and credit cards from one dashboard, Amex had previously announced.</p> <p>But, that still fails to explain the telephone service disruptions.</p> <p>Cyber threat intel analyst Anis Haboubi surmised if the recent hacks on Okta, Sitel, and Globant by Lapsus\$ could've played a role—both Sitel and Globant list Amex among their clients.</p> <p>However, BleepingComputer hasn't seen hard evidence just yet establishing a link between these incidents.</p> <p>The claims of users facing difficulties making payments towards their Amex account balances were also reproduced by BleepingComputer.</p>

	<p>When navigating to the 'Make a payment' page, payment history did not load. Clicking on 'Add a Debit Card' button redirected us to a map of nearby ATMs.</p> <p>As of this morning, the Amex online account services do allow payments via bank account, a newly introduced feature especially for UK customers, in addition to accepting debit card payments.</p> <p>This indicates the payments giant quite likely broke something while rolling out the new functionality, as far as the online services outage is concerned.</p> <p>On April 1st, after multiple reports of problems faced by customers, American Express did confirm that the online account services were back up on both web and mobile...</p> <p>However, in its latest tweet, American Express has backtracked and explains some customers may still face issues:</p> <p>"We're experiencing a systems issue resulting in some Card Members being unable to access products & services on web & mobile app. Most systems have been restored, but some customers may experience longer-than-usual hold times. We apologize to our customers for any inconvenience."</p> <p>The reason behind these multi-hour disruptions is yet to be known. The impact to Amex phone lines, in addition to the web and mobile app outages, makes this case especially interesting.</p> <p>While this could just be another instance of network outages or a broken feature integration, it isn't unusual for call centers and websites of companies to go down at the same time, following a cyberattack.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	04/03 New Borat remote access malware
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/new-borat-remote-access-malware-is-no-laughing-matter/
GIST	<p>A new remote access trojan (RAT) named Borat has appeared on darknet markets, offering easy-to-use features to conduct DDoS attacks, UAC bypass, and ransomware deployment.</p> <p>As a RAT, Borat enables remote threat actors to take complete control of their victim's mouse and keyboard, access files, network points, and hide any signs of their presence.</p> <p>The malware lets its operators choose their compilation options to create small payloads that feature precisely what they need for highly tailored attacks.</p> <p>Borat was analyzed by researchers at Cyble, who spotted it in the wild and sampled the malware for a technical study that revealed its functionality.</p> <p>Extensive features</p> <p>It is unclear if the Borat RAT is sold or freely shared among cybercriminals, but Cycle says it comes in the form of a package that includes a builder, the malware's modules, and a server certificate.</p> <p>The features of the trojan, each having its own dedicated module, include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keylogging – monitor and log key presses and store them in a txt file • Ransomware – deploy ransomware payloads onto the victim's machine and automatically generate a ransom note through Borat • DDoS – direct garbage traffic to a target server by using the compromised machine's resources • Audio recording – record audio via the microphone, if available, and store it in a wav file • Webcam recording – record video from the webcam, if available • Remote desktop – start a hidden remote desktop to perform file operations, use input devices, execute code, launch apps, etc. • Reverse proxy – set up a reverse proxy to protect the remote operator from having their identity exposed

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Device info – gather basic system information • Process hollowing – inject malware code into legitimate processes to evade detection • Credential stealing – steal account credentials stored in Chromium-based web browsers • Discord token stealing – steal Discord tokens from the victim • Other functions – disrupt and confuse the victim by playing audio, swapping the mouse buttons, hiding the desktop, hiding the taskbar, holding the mouse, turning off the monitor, showing a blank screen, or hanging the system <p>As noted in Cyble’s analysis, the above features make Borat essentially a RAT, spyware, and ransomware, so it’s a potent threat that could conduct a variety of malicious activity on a device.</p> <p>All in all, even though the RAT's developer decided to name it after the main character of the comedy movie Borat, incarnated by Sacha Baron Cohen, the malware is no joke at all.</p> <p>By digging deeper trying to find the origin of this malware, Bleeping Computer found that the payload executable was recently identified as AsyncRAT, so it's likely that its author based his work on it.</p> <p>Typically, threat actors distribute these tools via laced executables or files that masquerade as cracks for games and applications, so be careful not to download anything from untrustworthy sources such as torrents or shady sites.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 Fake Trezor breach emails steal wallets
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/fake-trezor-data-breach-emails-used-to-steal-cryptocurrency-wallets/
GIST	<p>A compromised Trezor hardware wallet mailing list was used to send fake data breach notifications to steal cryptocurrency wallets and the assets stored within them.</p> <p>Trezor is a hardware cryptocurrency wallet that allows you to store your crypto assets offline, rather than using cloud-based wallets or wallets stored on your PC that are more vulnerable to theft.</p> <p>When setting up a new Trezor, a 12 to 24-word recovery seed will be displayed that allows owners to recover their wallets if their device is stolen or lost.</p> <p>However, anyone who knows this recovery seed can gain access to the wallet and its stored cryptocurrencies, making it vital to store the recovery seed in a safe place.</p> <p>Starting today, Trezor hardware wallet owners began receiving data breach notifications prompting recipients to download a fake Trezor Suite software that would steal their recovery seeds.</p> <p>Trezor confirmed on Twitter that these emails were a phishing attack sent through one of their opt-in newsletters hosted at MailChimp.</p> <p>Trezor later said that MailChimp allegedly confirmed their service was compromised by an "insider" targeting cryptocurrency companies.</p> <p>BleepingComputer has contacted MailChimp to learn more about this compromise but has not received a reply at this time.</p> <p>A deeper look at the Trezor attack</p> <p>The phishing attack started with the Trezor hardware wallet owners receiving fake security incident emails claiming to be a data breach notification.</p>

"We regret to inform you that Trezor has experienced a security incident involving data belonging to 106,856 of our customers, and that the wallet associated with your e-mail address [email here] is within those affected by the breach.," reads fake Trezor data breach phishing email.

These fake data breach emails say that the company does not know the extent of the breach and that owners should download the latest Trezor Suite to set up a new PIN on their hardware wallet.

The email includes a 'Download Latest Version' button that brings the recipient to a phishing site that appears in the browser as suite.trezor.com.

However, the website is a domain name using Punycode characters that allows the attackers to impersonate the trezor.com domain using accented or Cyrillic characters, with the actual domain name being suite.xn--trzor-o51b[.]com.

It should be noted that the legitimate Trezor website is trezor.io.

This fake site prompts users to download the Trezor Suite application....

When a visitor downloads the desktop app, it will download a fake Trezor Suite application from the phishing site named 'Trezor-Suite-22.4.0-win-x64.exe'....

As the Trezor Suite is open source, the threat actors downloaded the source code and created their own modified app that looks identical to the original, legitimate application.

Ironically, this fake suite even includes Trezor's warning banner about phishing attacks at the top of the application's screen.

However, once Trezor owners connect their device to the fake Trezor Suite app, it will prompt them to enter their 12 to 24-word recovery phrase, which is sent back to the threat actors.

Now that the threat actors have your recovery phrase, they can use it to import the recovery phrase into their own wallets and steal victims' cryptocurrency assets.

An almost identical attack targeted Ledger hardware crypto wallet owners with phishing attacks leading to fake Ledger Live software.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/01 Anonymous targets Russia oligarchs
SOURCE	https://securityaffairs.co/wordpress/129713/hacktivism/anonymous-hacked-marathon-group.html?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Anonymous continues to target Russian firms owned by oligarchs, yesterday the collective announced the hack of the Thozis Corp, while today the group claimed the hack of Marathon Group.</p> <p>The Marathon Group is a Russian investment firm owned by oligarch Alexander Vinokuro, who was sanctioned by the EU. Vinokurov is the son-in-law of Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov.</p> <p>The group breached the systems of the company and released 62,000 emails (a 52GB archive) through DDoSecrets.</p> <p>Anonymous also claimed the hack of a website of the Government of Belarus related to the Economy of Volozhin, a Belarusian city in the Minsk region.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/01 Fallout of Salt Lake City IT security breach
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SOURCE	https://www.ksl.com/article/50380004/documents-reveal-financial-fallout-of-salt-lake-city-it-security-breach?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>SALT LAKE CITY – The case against a former Salt Lake City information technology employee accused of leaking undercover police information has raised questions and concerns about how the city and its police department safeguard sensitive information.</p> <p>Officials have been tight-lipped about the incident and have refused multiple interview requests since the employee's arrest last October, citing the pending investigation and criminal case. Now, documents obtained by the KSL Investigators reveal new information that led a judge to dismiss a felony charge in the criminal case as well as the costs to taxpayers adding up in the wake of what the city calls a security breach.</p> <p>Patrick Driscoll, 50, is accused of providing identifying and compromising information about undercover Salt Lake City police officers to a man accused of running a sex-trafficking ring, in exchange for money or sex.</p> <p>Since his October arrest, Driscoll faces additional charges suggesting he participated in and benefited from the alleged criminal enterprise.</p> <p>During a hearing earlier this month, 3rd District Judge Chelsea Koch ruled prosecutors presented enough evidence to bind over eight of the nine charges against Driscoll for trial.</p> <p>The charges include aggravated human trafficking, obstruction of justice, computer crimes, aggravated exploitation of prostitution and a pattern of unlawful activity.</p> <p>'He did so with authorization'</p> <p>Koch found insufficient evidence to bind over one felony charge of computer crimes interfering with critical infrastructure.</p> <p>The charge relied on a sworn statement from the city detailing efforts to assess what happened.</p> <p>"The Salt Lake City individual who has been tasked with going through has indicated that there were no security breaches," Koch said. "If there were no security breaches, then the inference, the only inference the court can draw is that he did so with authorization."</p> <p>That document, obtained by the KSL Investigators through a public records request, states more than 150 databases and all public safety software systems were reviewed for potential compromises but, "none have been found."</p> <p>Driscoll was never an officer or an employee of the police department but still had "full access to the police department as well as all city and law enforcement databases," according to court documents.</p> <p>Koch did bind over a second computer crimes count, however, citing supporting evidence that Driscoll took home files that should have been deleted and kept police images of prostitutes that he is accused of using for his own sexual gratification.</p> <p>"The distinction I make there is that while he may have had initial authorization for that, he exceeded his authorization," Koch said.</p> <p>Breach or no breach?</p> <p>No employee should have "carte blanche access to everything across an IT infrastructure," according to Earl Foote, founder and CEO of Nexus IT.</p> <p>"If (information is) accessed, you know, in accordance with that person's daily duties and roles to help support the organization and its users, fine. There's no nefarious activity there," Foote said. "Once it turns</p>

into, 'I want access for a reason beyond that, that's personal and or to expose it to third parties,' yes, that constitutes a breach."

Foote said it appears the city is taking appropriate steps to respond to the incident but noted most security breaches are preventable.

"I think there's no question here that some of the common controls and measures that should happen within an IT department probably were not as robust as they should be," he said.

Cost to taxpayers

The city's sworn statement reveals another side of the fallout: the cost to taxpayers.

"Cyber incidents have become astronomically expensive," said Foote, who told KSL the average cost of a security breach in Utah is \$2.5 million.

While some of the information in the document is redacted, the statement notes a \$12,000 expense as well as a \$34,000 expense. The latter lines up with a \$34,000 purchase order obtained by the KSL Investigators for a digital forensic audit procured by the city.

The statement also estimated 2,000 hours of employee time spent responding to the breach, totaling \$90,000 using a conservative average hourly rate of \$45. The total cost outlined in the document, as of Dec. 2, 2021, amounts to \$136,000, which Foote anticipates will grow.

"I would easily suspect this one incident to escalate into the hundreds of thousands of dollars," he said. "Maybe half a million plus, it wouldn't surprise me at all."

A spokesperson in the mayor's office confirmed the city does have a cybersecurity insurance policy that predates the breach, but it's unclear how much, if any, of the costs will be covered. The city has not yet submitted a claim.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/01 FBI: ransomware targets local governments
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/fbi-warns-ransomware-attacks-targeting-local-governments?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) this week warned local government entities of ransomware attacks disrupting operational services, causing public safety risks, and causing financial losses.</p> <p>In a Private Industry Notification (PIN), the FBI underlined the significance of such attacks, due to the public's dependency on services overseen by local governments, including critical utilities, education, and emergency services.</p> <p>According to the FBI, local government entities within the government facilities sector (GFS) represented the second most targeted group following academia, based on victim incident reporting throughout 2021.</p> <p>Last year, smaller counties and municipalities represented the majority of victimized local government agencies, "likely indicative of their cybersecurity resource and budget limitations," the FBI says.</p> <p>Based on an independently-conducted survey, local governments are the least able to prevent ransomware attacks and recover from backups, and often pay the ransom to get the data back.</p> <p>Ransomware attacks on local governments may result not only in the disruption of services, but also in the compromise of data, and could have significant impact on local communities.</p> <p>In January 2022, Bernalillo County had to shut down its computer systems and public offices following a ransomware incident.</p>

	<p>The attack also resulted in emergency response operations falling to “backup contingencies,” and in the lockdown of the Metropolitan Detention Center (MDC), after surveillance cameras at the facility were disabled, and automated doors deactivated.</p> <p>In September 2021, a ransomware attack on a US county’s network shut down the county courthouse and resulted in the compromise of a large amount of data.</p> <p>In a May 2021 attack, a county’s operations, including scheduling of COVID-19 vaccination appointments, were crippled and the attackers claimed to have stolen over 2.5 gigabytes of data.</p> <p>In January 2021, an attack on another local US county government’s systems resulted in the encryption of jail and courthouse computers, as well as election, financial, law enforcement, and other files.</p> <p>The incident impacted the sheriff department’s records management program and public defender office computers, among others.</p> <p>Ransomware is typically distributed through phishing, RDP connections, and software vulnerabilities, and remote working caused by the COVID-19 pandemic provided threat actors with new attack vectors.</p> <p>“In the next year, local US government agencies almost certainly will continue to experience ransomware attacks, particularly as malware deployment and targeting tactics evolve, further endangering public health and safety, and resulting in significant financial liabilities,” the FBI says.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/01 West races to counter Putin’s propaganda
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/1/west-races-counter-putins-propaganda-war-through-c/
GIST	<p>The West is in a race against time to counter the Kremlin’s propaganda inside Russia as President Vladimir Putin accelerates efforts to cut his people off from the outside world.</p> <p>Mr. Putin has waged an information war on Western and independent news media in Russia, ousting foreign news sites, banning social media giants and threatening penalties of up to 15 years in prison for those who publish what the Kremlin labels “fake news” about the war.</p> <p>The Kremlin has flooded airwaves with a barrage of falsehoods about the war, which it refers to as a “special military operation.” Many Russians believe Moscow was forced to invade Ukraine to protect Russians against Ukrainian aggressors and that Ukraine is run by Nazis.</p> <p>Many Russians believe the Kremlin’s explanation that videos and photographs of bloodied Ukrainian citizens are Western propaganda staged with actors and special effects, that the Ukraine military is bombing its country’s residential buildings and that the U.S. is covertly manufacturing biological weapons in Ukraine.</p> <p>Though Mr. Putin largely succeeded in dictating the narrative within Russia about his war on Ukraine, many in the country thirst for outside news.</p> <p>“We still see the desire of the Russian public to really understand what is happening,” said Kiryl Sukhotski, Radio Free Europe’s regional director for Europe, a U.S. government-funded news organization that began broadcasting in the Soviet Union during the Cold War. “Of course, there is quite substantial support for Putin’s war in Russia. That’s why it is so important to penetrate through this wall of propaganda that the Kremlin is building.”</p> <p>Radio Free Europe was forced out of Russia this month.</p> <p>To break through, people in Russia are relying on virtual private networks or VPNs that so far still give them internet access to outside news outlets and social media posts.</p>

On March 4, Radio Free Europe suspended its operations in Russia after authorities targeted it with bankruptcy proceedings and its Moscow-based journalists came under the increasing threat of imprisonment for deviating from Kremlin talking points on the war in Ukraine.

Other foreign news outlets targeted in Moscow's information crackdown include the BBC, Deutsche Welle and Voice of America.

Since being driven out of Russia, Radio Free Europe has continued to reach Russians through YouTube, where views on its content have more than tripled since the start of the war, said Mr. Sukhotski.

He said traffic on Radio Free Europe's website has also skyrocketed as more and more Russians download VPNs to bypass Russian internet controls.

Since the start of the invasion, Russia has accelerated efforts to unplug from Western tech platforms and switch to domestic alternatives, further tightening its grip on information and public perception.

But those attempts have been stymied by its dependence on Western tech companies that still serve as the backbone of the Russian economy. While Russia has banned Facebook and Instagram, it has still not banned YouTube.

Russia is still heavily dependent on YouTube's parent company, Google, which could shelter the company from the Kremlin's heavy hand, said Alena Epifanova, a research fellow at the German Council on Foreign Relations.

"YouTube, which is still available, is still a very big obstacle for Roskomnadzor," Ms. Epifanova said, referring to the Kremlin's media watchdog. "If [Google] were to leave the country, it will practically mean that it can take with it the Android operating system, the Google Chrome browser, which is also the most popular browser in Russia, and also other products which are widely used by Russians."

"Russia's business and also Russia's state authorities, Russian people, they benefit from these technologies," she said referring to Google and other Western tech giants such as Microsoft and Oracle. "Russia does not have the same level of technologies to switch to which could be an alternative to Western technologies."

Still, it could be only a matter of time before they are completely cut off from their Russian audience.

"YouTube is still available but we do not know how long it is available," said Radio Free Europe's Mr. Sukhotski. "Russia closed down Facebook, closed down Instagram, closed down other social media networks that we still rely on Russians getting to them via VPN."

Policymakers in the West say the Russian people likely would not support the war if they knew the truth about it.

"The Russian people deserve the truth about Russia's unprovoked war of aggression and instead are being fed lies by the Putin regime," said Rep. Michael T. McCaul of Texas, the top Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, Connecticut Democrat, said Mr. Putin's war on truth is "irretrievably intertwined" with his kinetic assault on Ukraine.

"He could not be at war in Ukraine with the criminal, barbaric means that he is using and with the loss of life among his own troops if he could not suppress the truth in his own country," Mr. Blumenthal said. "We need to fortify and buttress the efforts of truth-tellers in Russia."

There are still areas in Russia's information ecosystem that the West can leverage to its advantage, experts say, but it will require resources and coordination between the news media and tech companies.

	<p>“In order to reach Russian audiences, we’re going to need the information version of a Berlin airlift,” said Peter Pomerantsev, a senior fellow at Johns Hopkins University and co-director of the Arena Initiative, a research project to overcome extreme polarization and disinformation.</p> <p>“Currently the Russian firewall is still pretty leaky,” he said. “We can get through pretty easily. But we know that it is going to get worse day by day. We need the expertise, the power, and the intentionality of the great tech companies — the American tech companies — to help us break through that firewall as it gets higher and higher and higher.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	04/01 Ukraine: Russia WhatsApp bot farm texts
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/5dgemn/ukraine-accuses-russia-of-using-whatsapp-bot-farm-to-ask-military-to-surrender
GIST	<p>Ukraine’s intelligence service accused Russia of running a bot farm that sent around 5,000 text messages to local police and military members asking them to surrender and defect.</p> <p>On Thursday, the Security Service of Ukraine (SSU) announced that it caught and disrupted the “special information operation” that was designed to “destabilize moral and psychological state of Ukrainian security forces.”</p> <p>The message, according to the press release, said: “The outcome of events is predetermined! Be prudent and refuse to support nationalism and leaders of the country who discredited themselves and already fled the capital!!!”</p> <p>Judging from the screenshot of the message published by the SSU it appears like the campaign was conducted on WhatsApp. The SSU did not immediately respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>WhatsApp did not immediately respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>The SSU said that it “quickly discovered and neutralized” the operation but “the enemy” was able to send 5,000 messages before that happened. According to the agency, the farm was run in an apartment in Dnipropetrovsk, a city in central Ukraine, and “remotely controlled from Russia.”</p> <p>During the invasion of Ukraine, Russia has conducted relatively stealthy malware attacks as well as disinformation and psychological operations. In March, the SSU announced that it had detained a “hacker” that was helping Russian troops route calls, place anonymous phone calls to invaders, send messages to Ukrainian security forces asking them to surrender, and apparently a similar operation to the one disrupted Thursday.</p> <p>“[SSU] detained a hacker who provided the occupiers mobile connection in Ukraine,” the SSU wrote in its announcement at the time.</p>
	Return to Top

Terror Conditions

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	04/02 Israel forces eliminate ‘imminent attack’
SOURCE	https://www.jewishpress.com/news/terrorism-news/major-terror-attack-foiled-4-soldiers-wounded-3-terrorists-dead/2022/04/02/
GIST	A terrorist cell responsible for multiple recent attacks against Israeli security forces was eliminated in the wee hours of Saturday in a joint IDF-Shin Bet operation that included forces from the undercover elite Duvdevan unit, the IDF said.

Security officials were alerted to an imminent attack, they tracked the terrorists and intercepted the cell just before 1 AM. The terrorists had put Israeli license plates on their vehicle to disguise themselves.

Four IDF soldiers were wounded in the clash.

One of the IDF special forces, listed in serious condition, was airlifted by helicopter to Haifa's Rambam Medical Center.

A second soldier is in fair condition. The other two are in good condition, according to a report by *Yediot Achronot* military analyst Yossi Yehoshua.

The terror cell eliminated early Saturday was originally linked to the Tanzim faction of Fatah, the Palestinian Authority's leading faction – headed by PA leader Mahmoud Abbas, according to a report by *IDF Army Radio Galei Tzahal*.

The cell operatives were on their way to carry out another attack when they were intercepted and killed in the Palestinian Authority village of Arraba, near Jenin.

Bennett: 'Ticking Time Bomb' Thwarted

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett [said in a video statement Saturday night](#) that Israel is "in the midst of a joint effort of all the security forces to stop the wave of recent attacks and restore security to Israeli citizens."

Bennett said the elimination of the terrorist cell earlier in the day "thwarted a ticking time bomb" and predicted there will be more attacks.

"We are working right now to prevent them. Our people act with great bravery, around the clock, in a hostile and violent environment, and I want to send a speedy recovery to the wounded in the operation," he added. "Terrorism and violence will not uproot us from here. We will get through this difficult period."

Members of Iran-backed Palestinian Islamic Jihad

All three operatives were members of the Iranian-backed Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorist organization, according to a statement issued by the group. PIJ identified the terrorists as members of its "Al Quds (Jerusalem) Brigades," and named them as Saeb Ava'hra, 30, and Khalil Twalbeh, 24 of Jenin, and Saif Abu Libdeh, 25 of Tulkarem, Israel's *Channel 13* Arab affairs journalist Hezi Simantov reported.

A fourth member of the terror cell was arrested overnight in a special operation near the Palestinian Authority village of Shuweika, near Tulkarem, in the territory of the IDF's Menashe Brigade, according to the IDF.

An M16 assault weapon and ammunition was seized as well, the IDF said.

"There is now a desire of every terrorist organization to be prominent in the violent struggle against Israel," said IDF Lt. Col Alon Eviatar, former Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT). "If Fatah decides to enter the battle, we will find ourselves in a very problematic situation."

Terror Groups Vow Revenge

"The Zionist enemy committed an aggressive crime against three of our heroic mujahideen [warriors] on the first day of the holy month of Ramadan," PIJ said in a statement issued in response to the terrorists' deaths.

"As we hold the enemy fully responsible for this crime, we affirm that the blood of our children will not be shed in vain," PIJ said in its statement. "The mujahideen will continue the jihad and resistance and the fight against the enemy, regardless of the sacrifices."

	<p>One of the terrorists left a will written just prior to the impending, planned an attack, “something big!” to provide justification for a PIJ rocket attack on Israel, Galei Tzahal reported.</p> <p>Gaza’s ruling Hamas terrorist organization, which often allies with PIJ, called the elimination of the terrorist cell a “cowardly assassination” in a statement issued on Saturday.</p> <p>“The enemy’s policy of killings and assassination against our people in the West Bank and occupied Jerusalem will not provide them with the security that they are looking for, nor will they grant them legitimacy on our land,” Hamas said.</p> <p>The allied Popular Resistance Committees added in its own statement, “Our people will continue their struggle until the occupation is defeated,” and called for “a strong and qualitative response to this heinous crime on every part of our occupied land.”</p> <p>The Gaza-based Palestinian Mujahideen Movement was quoted by The Jerusalem Post as saying, ““The assassination of the resistance fighters in Jenin is a Zionist crime that will not go without a response. The blood of the martyrs will remain a fuel that increases the resistance against this criminal enemy.”</p> <p>The group called on the Palestinian Authority to halt security coordination with Israel.</p> <p>The Palestinian Authority called on the international community to “provide international protection for the Palestinian people” and warned that Israel “bears the consequences of this dangerous escalation.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 Taliban trying to save Afghan highways
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/03/world/asia/afghanistan-taliban-salang-pass.html
GIST	<p>THE SALANG PASS, Afghanistan — The Taliban commander’s sneakers had soaked through from the melting snow, but that was the least of his problems. It was avalanche season in the Salang Pass, a rugged cut of switchback roads that gash through the Hindu Kush mountains in northern Afghanistan like some man-made insult to nature, and he was determined to keep the essential trade route open during his first season as its caretaker.</p> <p>The worry about traffic flow was both new and strange to the commander, Salahuddin Ayoubi, and his band of former insurgents. Over the last 20 years, the Taliban had mastered destroying Afghanistan’s roads and killing the people on them. Culverts, ditches, bridges, canal paths, dirt trails and highways: None were safe from the Taliban’s array of homemade explosives.</p> <p>But that all ended half a year ago. After overthrowing the Western-backed government in August, the Taliban are now trying to save what’s left of the economic arteries they had spent so long tearing apart.</p> <p>Nowhere is that more important than in the Salang Pass, where, at over two miles high, thousands of trucks lumber through the jagged mountains every day. It is the only viable land route to Kabul, the capital, from Afghanistan’s north and bordering countries like Uzbekistan. Everything bumps up its slopes and down its draws: Fuel, flour, coal, consumer goods, livestock, people.</p> <p>Whether approaching the pass from the north or south, vehicles are welcomed with an unexpected and signature flourish: dozens of car washers, often little more than one man or boy with a black hose that shoots cold river water in a continuous arc, waiting for a customer.</p> <p>For the weary traveler, who just spent hours zigzagging through the mountains that tower over either side of the road like stone gods, the cleaners are beacons, signaling good news: You’ve made it through the pass and survived the trip. So far.</p> <p>After decades of war, overuse and ad hoc repairs, the highway is in poor shape and prone to calamity. Navigating it demands a certain daring.</p>

So does the upkeep.

“The fighting was easier than dealing with this,” Mr. Ayoubi, 31, said last month, before hopping in his mud-spattered white pickup truck and making his way down the road, stopping occasionally to manage clogged columns of trucks.

Accidents and breakdowns are common occurrences on the potholed and perilous journey across the pass. But the greatest fear is getting stuck in a traffic jam in one of the highway’s long, pitch-black tunnels, where the buildup of carbon monoxide can suffocate those trapped within.

The centerpiece of the highway is the Salang Tunnel. Constructed by the Soviets in the 1960s, it was once the highest tunnel in the world.

Though there are different sections, the largest part of the tunnel is more than a mile long and takes anywhere between 10 to 15 minutes to traverse in the best scenario. The darkness within is all-encompassing, interrupted only by flickering yellow lights that seem to hang in midair because of the smoke and dust. Ventilation systems are limited to sets of fans at either end that do little except whine above the engine noise.

In the fall of 1982 it is estimated that more than 150 people died in the tunnel from an explosion of some kind, though details of the event still remain murky. Disasters such as that, along with avalanches like those in 2010 that killed dozens, loom over the Taliban running the pass, along with the several hundred infrequently paid former government workers alongside them.

To slow the road’s further destruction, the Taliban have strictly enforced weight restrictions on the trucks navigating the pass. The move is a small but substantive one, highlighting the group’s shift from a ragtag insurgency to a government acutely aware that foreign-funded road workers and lucrative construction contracts won’t materialize anytime soon.

But that decision hasn’t been without consequences: With trucks carrying less cargo, drivers are making less money each trip. That means they are spending less in the snack shops, hotels and restaurants that dot the road along the pass, piling additional misery on those who make their living here in a country whose economy was already collapsing.

“These Taliban policies affect all of us,” said Abdullah, 44, a shopkeeper who sells dried fruit and soft drinks. He is a second-generation Salang resident, and his stonewalled home overlooks the northern approach to the pass like a lighthouse. When his children peer out the windows to watch the convoy of trucks below, they look like tiny lighthouse keepers.

“In the past truck drivers would come and order three meals, now they just order one and share it,” Abdullah said.

In front of Abdullah’s house, Ahmad Yar, 24, a stocky truck driver hauling flour from the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, wasn’t thinking about his next meal. His truck, upon which his livelihood depended, had broken down. But in a fortunate twist of fate, he managed to frantically flag down a passing bus that miraculously had just the part he needed.

“Under the former government, we carried 40 tons of flour, now it’s 20,” Mr. Yar said, explaining that the Western-backed government couldn’t have cared less if his truck had been overweight. He then scampered up into his cab, threw his truck in gear and began the long trek up the pass.

Mr. Ayoubi defended the Taliban’s decision to enforce weight restrictions — and to alternate northbound and southbound traffic each day to avoid clogging the tunnels — arguing that keeping the road somewhat functional was better in the long run for Salang’s economy than letting it be completely destroyed.

But the short-term consequences have been devastating for Abdul Rasul, 49, a one-eyed food vendor who has been selling kebabs for 16 years in a spot tucked away behind the rows of car washers and the twisted metal of wrecked vehicles littered along the roadside. This season he's made about \$300, down from his average of around \$1,000.

"They're making less money," he said of his customers, "so they're taking less kebabs."

"It's not like the years before," he added.

And indeed it isn't, with the country's economy in a shambles and the Taliban's forces searching in the side valleys around the pass for remnants of resistance forces.

Everything seems to be different in the Salang Pass this year, except for the pass itself.

The towering rows of mountains and the rock-strewn valleys are as they've always been. In the distance, truck after truck could be seen crawling up the pass like a line of ants. Beggars and cold dogs sit at the hairpin turns, where drivers have to slow almost to a stop. The passing old Soviet trucks and Ford pickups provide a history lesson of former occupiers.

Abdul Rahim Akhgar, 54, a traffic officer in the Salang for nearly three decades, held this same job the last time the Taliban were in power in the 1990s. On a recent afternoon he stood on the roadside at the northern mouth of the pass and looked at a twisted flatbed truck that had veered off the road and slammed into the side of a house below an hour or two earlier.

The crash killed one passenger and about a dozen or so caged chickens. Mr. Akhgar reckoned that 50 people die in the pass in accidents each year. But all in all, he added, it's better now.

"There's no fighting," he said as a young boy wrestled with a chicken that survived the crash. "And travelers can travel easier."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/03 Taliban outlaw opium farming Afghanistan
SOURCE	https://news.sky.com/story/afghanistan-taliban-outlaws-growing-of-lucrative-opium-poppy-as-it-seeks-easing-of-sanctions-12581378
GIST	<p>Poppy growing has been banned by the Taliban in Afghanistan, the world's biggest opium producer.</p> <p>Drug crops will be destroyed and offenders punished, the militant group's leadership has ruled.</p> <p>A crackdown on narcotics has been a major demand of the international community of the Taliban, which reclaimed power in Afghanistan last August, following the US-led withdrawal of troops.</p> <p>The group is seeking formal recognition in order to ease sanctions that are severely hampering banking, business and development.</p> <p>The order announced at a news conference by the Ministry of Interior in Kabul said: "As per the decree of the supreme leader of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, all Afghans are informed that from now on, cultivation of poppy has been strictly prohibited across the country.</p> <p>"If anyone violates the decree, the crop will be destroyed immediately and the violator will be treated according to the Sharia law."</p> <p>The production, use or transportation of other drugs has also been outlawed.</p> <p>The Taliban banned poppy growing towards the end of their last rule in 2000 as they sought international legitimacy, but backed down in the face of a popular backlash.</p>

Afghanistan's opium production was worth up to \$2.7bn (£2bn), according to a UK report in 2021, more than 7% of the country's GDP.

The same report said "illicit drug supply chains outside Afghanistan" made much more.

Nearly 80% of heroin produced from Afghan opium production reaches Europe through Central Asia and Pakistan.

Washington spent more than \$8bn (£6.1bn) trying to eradicate poppy production in Afghanistan during its nearly 20-year intervention.

The ban comes as the country faces a humanitarian crisis and its economy teeters.

The country's dire situation has prompted residents of southeastern provinces to grow the illicit crop that could bring them faster and higher returns than legal harvests such as wheat.

Poppies are the main source of income for millions of small farmers and day labourers can earn upwards of \$300 (£229) a month harvesting them and extracting the opium, which is used to make heroin.

They are often used as a form of banking among Afghanistan's poorest who use the promise of the next year's harvest to buy staples such as flour, sugar, cooking oil and heating oil.

Prohibiting poppy production will further impoverish Afghanistan's poorest citizens.

Taliban sources have said tough resistance is expected against the ban from some within the group.

A farmer in Helmand who spoke on condition of anonymity to the Reuters news agency said in recent weeks prices of poppy had already more than doubled on rumours the Taliban would ban its cultivation.

But he added that he needed to grow poppy to support his family.

"Other crops are just not profitable," he said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/02 UN concern: Mali violence on civilians
SOURCE	https://www.stripes.com/theaters/africa/2022-04-02/united-nations-concerned-civilians-amid-mali-militant-crackdown-5561153.html
GIST	<p>(Tribune News Service) — The United Nations peacekeeping mission in Mali voiced concern Saturday over reported violence against civilians, hours after the military said it killed over 200 terrorists in a weeklong raid in the country's center.</p> <p>Mali has intensified operations against armed groups with links to al-Qaida and the Islamic State in recent weeks, and the military has also boosted its capabilities with reported assistance by Russia's Wagner Group.</p> <p>The statement from the army chief of staff, released April 1, didn't make clear which group was the target of the March 23-31 operation in the central Mali village of Moura that killed 203 militants. Another 51 terrorists were arrested, it said.</p> <p>The fight against the Islamist militants in the West African nation has also raised concerns abroad about potential human rights violations by the military and Wagner Group. Last month, the government banned two French broadcasters after they reported on allegations of civilian deaths.</p> <p>The U.N. and Human Rights Watch have independently launched investigations into the claims.</p>

	<p>The U.N. mission in Mali, known as MINUSMA, in a tweet Saturday said it's "very concerned about the allegations of violence against civilians" following last month's military operation.</p> <p>Wagner deployed to Mali last year, according to French and U.S. officials, although Mali denies they're in the country.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 US repatriates Algerian after 20yrs Gitmo
SOURCE	https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10679683/US-sends-home-Algerian-held-nearly-20-years-Guantanamo.html
GIST	<p>An Algerian man imprisoned at the Guantanamo Bay detention center for nearly 20 years after being accused of being a bomb-making instructor for extremist groups has been released and sent back to his homeland.</p> <p>The Department of Defense announced Saturday that Sufyian Barhoumi, 48, was repatriated with assurances from the Algerian government that he would be treated humanely there and that security measures would be imposed to reduce the risk that he could pose a threat in the future.</p> <p>The Pentagon did not provide details about those security measures, which could include restrictions on travel.</p> <p>Barhoumi, who was never tried for a crime, was captured in Pakistan and taken to the U.S. base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in 2002.</p> <p>It was determined he was involved with various extremist groups but was not a member of al-Qaida or the Taliban, according to a report by a review board at the prison that approved him for release in 2016.</p> <p>His attorney, Shayana Kadidal of the Center for Constitutional Rights, said Barhoumi was a model prisoner at Guantanamo Bay who helped calm tensions between fellow prisoners and Army guards.</p> <p>He said Barhoumi would be freed back in Algeria to be the primary caretaker of his ailing mother and run a family restaurant.</p> <p>U.S. authorities attempted to prosecute Barhoumi for war crimes in 2008 for his alleged involvement as a bomb-making instructor in Pakistan, but the effort was dropped amid legal challenges to the initial version of the military commission system set up under President George W. Bush.</p> <p>In the final days of Barack Obama's presidency in January 2017, a federal judge in Washington declined to intervene in the Pentagon's decision not to repatriate Barhoumi, whose lawyer said he had expected his client to be released and that the prisoner's family had begun making preparations for his return, including buying him a car and a small restaurant for him to run.</p> <p>The Justice Department said then-Defense Secretary Ash Carter rejected the release of Barhoumi on January 12, 2017, 'based on a variety of substantive concerns, shared by multiple agencies,' without going into detail.</p> <p>Barhoumi, who lost four fingers in a land mine explosion in Afghanistan, offered to plead guilty to any charges in 2012 in the hope he could receive a fixed sentence and return to his elderly mother, according to Kadidal.</p> <p>'Our government owes Sufyian and his mother years of their lives back,' Kadidal said.</p> <p>'I'm overjoyed that he will be home with his family, but I will dearly miss his constant good humor and empathy for the suffering of others in the utterly depressing environment of Guantánamo.'</p>

The effort to resettle prisoners languished under President Donald Trump, who put a freeze on repatriations at Guantanamo Bay.

Despite Barhoumi the setback to his freedom, Kadidal said the inmate took the news in stride, telling his lawyers: 'It's not you who decides when I leave this place, and it is not politicians. It's God. He decides when I will go. So I am OK with his decision.'

The Biden administration is attempting again to reduce the number of men held at Guantanamo as part of a broader effort to close the facility.

'The United States appreciates the willingness of Algeria and other partners to support ongoing U.S. efforts toward a deliberate and thorough process focused on responsibly reducing the detainee population and ultimately closing of the Guantánamo Bay facility,' the Pentagon said in a statement on Saturday.

Barhoumi's release brings the total held at the U.S. base in Cuba to 37 men, including 18 who have been deemed eligible for repatriation or resettlement in a third country.

Last year, the Biden administration repatriated a Moroccan man who was set to be transferred to his homeland in 2016 in a deal brokered by the State Department's special envoy, Lee Wolosky, The New York Times reported.

On March 7, the U.S. Military repatriated Mohammed al-Qahtani, a mentally ill detainee who was suspected of being an intended hijacker in the September 11 terrorist attacks, back to Saudi Arabia.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/02 Pentagon investigates extremism in military
SOURCE	https://news.yahoo.com/pentagon-investigating-extremism-military-bad-061515073.html
GIST	<p>The Pentagon's most recent search for extremists within the ranks was just the latest failure to find evidence that the military is a breeding ground for violent radicals, a Fox News review has found.</p> <p>The Department of Defense identified fewer than 100 instances of confirmed extremist activity in 2021, the Pentagon reported in December. Despite significant rhetoric from Democrats, media pundits and activists, the finding was unsurprising to more than 30 current and former service members who spoke with Fox News.</p> <p>"I noticed zero extremism during my time in the military," Matthew Griffin, a former Army Ranger, told Fox News. "None. Didn't witness it at all."</p> <p>Each service member echoed similar remarks, explicitly saying they'd never seen any extremist behavior.</p> <p>The service members Fox News interviewed ranged from cadet to major. They spanned five branches and the political spectrum, and their service dates as far back as 1980.</p> <p>Being unable to find even 100 extremists in the military "is a success story and shows that extremism is not a large problem," a former command sergeant major said.</p> <p>Many said the service would even stamp out extremism since it would harm unit cohesion – a critical component to combat effectiveness across the branches. They also told Fox News that the military serves as a sort of melting pot that exposes recruits to unfamiliar cultures and people.</p> <p>"Even if you are kind of a piece of s--t, you have to be able to depend on the people with you or else you'll die or get hurt real bad," Jariko Denman, a retired Army Ranger, told Fox News. "All of the kind of ignorance that leads to extremist behavior, it's squashed because you're immersed in all these other cultures, you're immersed with all these other types of people."</p>

Given that investigations have repeatedly failed to prove a systemic problem, many service members told Fox News that dedicating significant time to pursuing extremists would ultimately take away from combat readiness.

They also said that senior officers are aware that a widespread issue doesn't exist, but won't push back because they're more concerned with falling in line to score promotions.

Still, activists and others have argued that even a few extremists with military training could create a massive risk. They frequently point to the Oklahoma City bomber, a veteran who killed more than 150 people, including children.

The Pentagon, along with its report on extremists in the military, provided updated guidance on identifying and handling extremists within the ranks.

"If someone had that kind of behavior that they exhibited and acted on or something, they would not last," one soldier who retired as a sergeant major with Special Forces after 27 years in the Army told Fox News. "There's so many checks and balances in the military that it'd really be hard to hide those kind of feelings."

The Pentagon did not respond to a request for comment.

The Pentagon and outside investigators alike have sought to identify extremists among the ranks, but none have turned up more than a handful out of the 2.1 million active duty service members, Fox News' review found.

After DOD reported in 2018 that just 18 service members had been disciplined or discharged for extremist activity over a five-year period, critics said the Pentagon wasn't looking hard enough.

"They always say the numbers are small, and because of that, it is not a priority," Carter Smith, a 30-year Army criminal investigator, told The New York Times in 2019. "So every year they get a report based on what they were never looking for."

He said the military needed to establish a task force to monitor extremist networks.

The 2021 DOD report boasted improvements to its process for catching extremists within the ranks before indicating that it found less than 100 instances.

The report also said the number of potentially violent radicals has increased over time. But that claim is impossible to verify since the Pentagon didn't provide an exact figure or even indicate whether it found more than it did in 2018.

Even with exhaustive investigations, there's no evidence that more extremists in the military would be uncovered.

Frontline and ProPublica partnered on a triple-byline news investigation in 2018. The three reporters conducted dozens of interviews, combed through 250,000 confidential messages and reviewed social media and other internet posts.

All told, they identified six people with military ties in Atomwaffen, an anti-government white supremacist group. Three were employed by the Army or Navy at the time, and the other three were veterans.

Additionally, a University of Maryland team reported that from 1990 through 2021, "461 individuals with U.S. military backgrounds committed criminal acts that were motivated by their political, economic, social, or religious goals."

But it noted that 120 of those – or about one-quarter – were charged for breaching the Capitol building on Jan. 6, 2021. The report also pointed out that those with military background made up less than 12% of the people charged with crimes related to extremism over the 31-year period.

"Scholars are generally in agreement that there is no single profile of an extremist," the report said.

Further, nearly 84% of the 461 identified were no longer in the military when they committed a criminal act of extremism, according to the University of Maryland report. Almost 40% had left the service 15 or more years before they were arrested for extremism, while just over 15% were out for two or fewer years.

Meanwhile, the head of the Pentagon's anti-extremism working group, Bishop Garrison, said supporting former President Trump is supporting racism and extremism, the Daily Caller News Foundation previously reported.

Critics have argued that even a small number of extremists with military experience could pose a significant threat.

"The numbers might be small, but they are like a drop of cyanide in your drink," Carter told The New York Times in 2019. "They can do a lot of damage."

The University of Maryland team determined that extremists with military backgrounds killed 314 people over the 31-year period. More than half were from a single event.

The notorious Oklahoma bomber, Timothy McVeigh, was a decorated Gulf War veteran who was radicalized before joining the Army.

About four years after he was honorably discharged, McVeigh bombed a federal building in Oklahoma City in 1995, killing 168, including 19 children, and injuring hundreds more.

Other high-profile extremists have also had military ties, including Ku Klux Klan Grand Dragon Louis Beam, Aryan Nations founder Richard Butler and White Patriot Party leader Frazier Glenn Miller.

Atomwaffen founder Brandon Russell was serving in Florida's National Guard when he was arrested in 2017 after authorities found a stash of explosives, including the same substance McVeigh used.

Russell, who kept a framed picture of McVeigh on his dresser, according to the Department of Justice, was sentenced to five years in prison.

Meanwhile, nearly one-quarter of troops polled in a Military Times survey said they witnessed white nationalism within the ranks, though it's unclear how that phrase was defined. Subsequent surveys by the publication reported similar findings.

Several service members told Fox News they may have witnessed racism or bigotry among rookies. But they said that was exclusively among new recruits who hailed from hometowns with little diversity and had little exposure to other groups of people.

"They're going to carry those opinions with them because it's what they know," Denman said. "Once they were in the military and they could actually see people from other cultures and backgrounds and all these things, they're like, 'Oh, that was dumb.'"

Advocates have also said that extremist groups actively try recruiting veterans. Guidance DOD released alongside its 2021 report called for a program to help service members avoid such recruitment as they transition out of the military.

Every service member Fox News interviewed for this story – on and off the record – said they never witnessed extremism during their time in the military.

"Over three decades in the military, I never saw this as an issue," an Army veteran who did four tours in Iraq and Afghanistan said.

Griffin added: "I think the media is definitely exacerbating this issue. They had their hypothesis that the military is full of extremists and they're willing to go down on the ship just to state so."

Denman, whose grandfathers, father and older brother were all in the military, said the charge is "absolutely not fair, and it sheds a really piss poor light on the military as a whole."

"Seeing all these people of all walks of life – different races, different creeds, different sexual orientations – all this doing great things together, and then to have our government come in and say 'the military has an extremism problem,' it's a slap in the face," Denman continued. "It's an insult to all those people that are out there doing the right thing."

Still, Denman, as well as an active duty Navy officer said they felt it was important to ensure extremism wasn't a problem.

"We all are better served when we have sort of a middle of the road kind of viewpoint about things," the officer said. "Anybody who's polarized is probably not healthy for our democracy."

But many service members said focusing on something they believe isn't an issue harms combat readiness since it takes up time officers could spend preparing troops for battle.

"If we burden the military leadership with so much other issues, we are really taking away from what the military is there for. That's to defend our borders and to execute American policy," a former Special Forces sergeant, whose son is in the Army, told Fox News.

Weeks before the Kremlin launched its invasion of Ukraine, Tyler Allcorn, a former Green Beret running for Congress in Colorado as a Republican told Fox News: "We need to spend less time on these witch hunts targeting our own soldiers and spending more time focused on strategic threats like China and Russia and any others that are threatening our country."

"If Joe Biden had put this much time into developing an exit strategy for Afghanistan than he does targeting our own soldiers ... then maybe the 13 service members who lost their lives back in that country would be alive today," Allcorn added.

Many service members told Fox News they believed senior leadership, including Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mark Milley, knew extremism wasn't a systemic issue, but were too afraid to oppose that narrative.

"I believe Austin and Milley went along whole heartedly," the former command sergeant major said, noting how Milley told Congress he wanted to understand "white rage."

Others said senior officers care more about advancing their careers. As a result, the service members said, those officers won't press against their superiors when they see bad orders.

"There is an attempt to politicize our military to weed out officers who don't buy hook, line and sinker into this new age modernity," the four-tour Army veteran said. Senior officers "lack the moral courage to say, 'Hey boss, that's really stupid.'"

Nickaylah Sampson, who dropped out of West Point last year, said she "met officers firsthand just who flat out told me the only way to make rank is by fulfilling the wants of the officers ahead of you no matter what it is."

A Special Operations Central deputy commander argued that this growing culture caused the botched Afghanistan withdrawal, Fox News previously reported.

"When you get in that general officer area, you don't want to rock the boat with whoever is currently in office or who you think will be in office," Denman, who stressed his hate for officers, told Fox News. The military will "never do things for the benefit of a particular political party, but I do think that a lot of the decisions are made or not made by a lot of the higher-level brass like generals with politics in mind."

Many service members also saw the hunt for extremists as politically unbalanced, disproportionately targeting the right while ignoring left-wing extremists. Last year, Austin ordered a stand-down to discuss extremism, but gave commanders discretion in how to handle it.

An active duty special operations officer told Fox News that her commander presented a slide show during the stand-down that depicted Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee, Osama bin Laden and the QAnon Shaman – the shirtless, horn-bearing Capitol rioter.

"I immediately was like, 'OK, this is politicized to me, because if you're going to put one end of the political spectrum up against Osama bin Laden, then why don't you put someone up against the left end of the political spectrum?'" the service member said. She suggested showing a rioter from the 2020 Black Lives Matter demonstrations burning down a building.

The DOD's 2021 guidance also tightened some restrictions and forbid service members from liking or sharing extremist content on social media.

"If the American government is going to go and surveil the social media accounts of over two million military patriots and heroes for extremism, then I think they should also monitor the social media accounts of Joe Biden's administration, Nancy Pelosi and probably all the Democrats in Congress," Allcorn told Fox News. "I guarantee you're going to find more than a hundred extremists in that group."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/03 Blast in Afghan capital; 1 killed, 59 injured
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/witnesses-explosion-in-afghan-capital-wounds-at-least-15/
GIST	<p>KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — An explosion in the center of the Afghan capital of Kabul on Sunday killed one person and wounded at least 59 others, hospital officials said.</p> <p>In a tweet, Kabul's Emergency Hospital said one body was received at the hospital and 59 people were treated, with 30 of the wounded being admitted for further treatment. It did not specify the injuries.</p> <p>A spokesman for the Taliban's Kabul police, Khalid Zadran, said the explosion was caused by a hand grenade thrown by a would-be thief who wanted to rob the money changers in the area. He said 10 people were injured. There was no immediate explanation for the discrepancy in the number of wounded.</p> <p>Zadran said police have launched an investigation.</p> <p>Video shot by AP showed wounded being removed from the site, carried by passersby.</p> <p>Wais Ahmad, a money changer, said the explosion happened inside a market where money changers operate. The market was closed immediately after the explosion and Taliban security surrounded the area..</p> <p>The blast was the first in the Afghan capital in months. Afghanistan's Taliban rulers have stepped up security throughout most of the country since sweeping to power in August.</p> <p>Taliban troops man dozens of checkpoints throughout the city.</p>

	<p>The greatest threat facing the Taliban comes from the Islamic State group affiliate known as Islamic State in Khorasan Province, or IS-K. The Taliban have cracked down on the affiliate in its stronghold in eastern Afghanistan.</p> <p>In a statement, IS-K said late Saturday they targeted a Taliban vehicle in Kabul, killing everyone inside the vehicle. However, there was no confirmation from the Taliban rulers or signs of an explosion on Saturday.</p> <p>The IS statement also claimed an explosion in western Herat province targeting the country's minority Shiite Muslims. There was no confirmation of any explosion in Herat and the IS often makes exaggerated claims.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	04/02 Trial change future of US terrorism cases?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/02/islamic-state-el-shafee-elsheikh-trial-virginia
GIST	<p>As the trial against the accused Islamic State fighter El Shafee Elsheikh began this week on American soil, jurors in a northern Virginia courtroom were quickly exposed to accounts of unimaginable brutality.</p> <p>Elsheikh, prosecutors alleged, carried out terrorist acts that involved the grisly deaths of four Americans – the journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff, as well as the aid workers Kayla Mueller and Peter Kassig.</p> <p>Elsheikh, a former British national, allegedly did so as part of a three-man cell dubbed “the Beatles” by the group’s hostages, due to their English accents. Officials have said that this cell was responsible for the kidnappings of more than 20 westerners between 2012 and 2015.</p> <p>IS members decapitated Foley, Kassig, and Sotloff. The leader of IS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, repeatedly raped Mueller before she was killed.</p> <p>Legal experts told the Guardian that Elsheikh’s trial would help provide a sense of justice to victims’ families and show that international terrorism cases can, and should, be held in US civilian courts – an important precedent.</p> <p>David Viola, a professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice’s Center on Terrorism, said Elsheikh’s trial demonstrated that the US could get justice through the legal process, not solely by relying on military force.</p> <p>“The trial proves to the world, hostage-takers, terrorists and others that the US has a virtually unlimited reach and a very long memory,” Viola said.</p> <p>The prosecutor John Gibbs described Elsheikh as an IS leader who relished cruelty. Elsheikh and his accomplices had beaten hostages more frequently than did low-level guards, Gibbs said on Wednesday in his opening statement.</p> <p>“If a hostage looked at any of the three men, they would be beaten,” said Gibbs. “In fact, they did not have to do anything to be beaten.”</p> <p>Hostages who were poised to be released after paying ransoms even endured “going-away beatings”, Gibbs said, noting that Elsheikh and his accomplices once struck a hostage 25 times when they learned it was his 25th birthday, the Associated Press reported.</p> <p>The IS fighters “were utterly terrifying” to hostages, Gibbs said. Hostages had to kneel, face the wall and avoid eye contact with their captors.</p> <p>Federico Motka, an aid worker, said that he and his fellow aid worker David Haines were forced to fight captured journalists, including Foley and John Cantlie. “They were super excited about it,” Motka, who was held captive for 14 months and released in May 2014, testified. “We were so weak and shattered we could barely lift our arms.”</p>

The cell described these forced fights as a “royal rumble”, Motka said. They further humiliated the hostages by giving mock commentary on these forced fights. They were forced to fight until passing out.

“They played lots of games with us,” Motka told jurors. “They gave us dog names. We needed to come and immediately respond.”

Motka claimed that in late 2013 and early 2014, hostages had to wear orange jumpsuits, with their captors saying they wanted to re-create “conditions to the detainees at Guantánamo Bay”. Motka said that he endured waterboarding and electrocution through an opening in his cell “until my hands went rigid”.

Elsheikh and another Briton, Alexandra Amon Kotey, were caught in January 2018 by Kurdish fighters while trying to escape from Syria to Turkey. They were brought to US authorities in Iraq and eventually transported to Virginia in 2020, for criminal proceedings.

British officials stripped Elsheikh and Kotey of their UK citizenship but delayed their transfer to the US until authorities agreed not to pursue the death penalty against them.

Kotey pleaded guilty in September 2021 and is awaiting sentencing. His plea deal stipulates life imprisonment; after 15 years, however, he could serve the rest of his sentence in the UK if authorities there are willing to accept him.

The cell ringleader, Mohammed Emwazi, known as “Jihadi John”, died during a US drone strike in Syria about seven years ago.

Elsheikh’s attorney, Edward MacMahon, has contended that there is no evidence proving he was in the terror cell. MacMahon conceded that Elsheikh had traveled to Syria to fight in IS but said cell members always wore masks, making it difficult to identify them.

But amid the awful to and fro in the courtroom and the details of cruelty, violence and death, experts believe the trial’s legacy will concern far bigger issues than individual violence.

“We’re a nation of laws. Our power and our legitimacy can never solely be derived from our military might,” said Viola, who has served as an intelligence officer in the US navy reserve. “We have to hold the likes of Elsheikh accountable ... in front of a judge and jury.”

Viola continued: “This is the kind of proof we need for the world, and for ourselves, that laws can have a more profound and lasting impact, and importantly, bring closure to the families of the men and women who died.”

Jason M Blazakis, director of the Center on Terrorism, Extremism, and Counterterrorism at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies, said Elsheikh’s trial showed that the US would prosecute more of this type of case.

“I think the trial, in and of itself, demonstrates that the United States is serious about ensuring that the law is applied against individuals engaged in hostage taking – no matter how long it’s been between the actual hostage taking and the actual trial itself,” Blazakis said. “There is no statute essentially of limitations in terms of trying to bring people to justice for the horrible crimes they allegedly committed.”

In Blazakis’s view, these proceedings might send a message to people who are considering similar actions and prevent some from doing so.

“There are always going to be individuals who sacrifice themselves for some ideological objective – those types of individuals are not going to spend a lot of time thinking about this court case,” Blazakis said. “But there are other kinds of bad actors who are less steeped in the religious ideological milieu of Isis who could be deterred.”

	Trial testimony resumes next week.
Return to Top	

Suspicious, Unusual

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	04/04 Airfares up 40% from Jan; more increases?
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/life/travel/us-airfares-are-up-40-from-january-and-more-increases-are-expected/
GIST	<p>U.S. domestic airfares have risen by 40% since January, according to analysts.</p> <p>Round-trip domestic flights are now averaging \$330, as compared with \$235 at the beginning of 2022, said analysts at travel comparison company Hopper.</p> <p>That's also an increase of 7% over 2019's pre-pandemic pricing, making these the highest prices the company has seen since it started collecting this data. International fares are on par with 2019's prices at an average of \$810 round trip, but up by 25% from the \$650 average seen at the start of the year.</p> <p>The March 2022 edition of Hopper's Consumer Airfare Index examined current airfare, airfare forecasts, the impact of jet fuel costs, top destinations for this summer and more.</p> <p>Near-term airfare forecast</p> <p>Hopper said it expects round trip domestic airfare prices to remain at around \$320-\$330 until the end of April, but it predicts prices increase 10% to \$360 by the end of May and remain that way through June.</p> <p>The company is forecasting that international fares will continue to match 2019 prices through May, but increase by about 15% from present prices and exceed 2019 prices by about 5% in June, bringing the average cost of a round trip ticket to \$940.</p> <p>Where are travelers going?</p> <p>Based on the number of travel searches seen for late spring and early summer, the most popular domestic destinations seem to be 1) New York City, 2) Las Vegas, 3) Orlando, 4) Washington D.C., 5) Miami, 6) Los Angeles, 7) Dallas, 8) Atlanta, 9) Denver and 10) Chicago.</p> <p>Among internet search users, the most sought-after international destinations were revealed to be 1) London, 2) Paris, 3) Cancún, 4) San Juan, 5) Mexico City, 6) Rome, 7) Manila, 8) Delhi, 9) Tokyo and 10) Madrid.</p> <p>How far in advance are they booking?</p> <p>Hopper's report noted that travelers are continuing to book their trips close to their actual travel dates than they did in pre-pandemic 2019, given that the future course of the pandemic remains uncertain and travel restrictions could still change at any time.</p> <p>It said that travelers are booking their domestic flights an average of 41 days in advance, a little sooner than the average 50 days ahead that people were booking in March 2019, but about the same as this time last year. International flights are being booked an average of 65 days ahead of time, about the same amount of lead time as in March 2021, but less than the average of 79 days seen in March 2019.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/01 Invasive rose- and hop-eating beetle
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/news/2022/04/wa-prepares-against-invasive-rose-and-hop-eating-beetle
GIST	The Grandview Rose Garden is one of the first things people see as they enter the eastern part of Grandview in Yakima County.

The garden, which features some 100 rose varieties, is a popular stop for those walking and biking along the Lower Yakima Valley Pathway, a trail that connects Grandview with two other cities — Sunnyside to the west in Yakima County and Prosser to the east in Benton County.

It's a common gathering place — its gazebo is a venue for weddings and quinceañeras.

But the garden's bounty has attracted an unwelcome visitor: the Japanese beetle.

Ray Vining, who has lived in Grandview for several decades and volunteers at the garden, first heard about the invasive species two years ago through reports of damaged rose bushes and gardens in the area. The first beetle specimens in Grandview were also found on Wine Country Road, close to the rose garden.

Several beetles were collected in a trap installed within the garden a year later. Those collected specimens would be among the thousands spotted in the city of more than 11,000 people.

Thankfully, there has yet to be any damage to the garden, and Vining and other volunteers want to keep it that way.

That's the hope of the Washington State Department of Agriculture, which is undertaking a multimillion, multiyear trapping, quarantining and eradication process to get rid of the beetle, which originated in Japan and made its presence first known in the eastern U.S. in the early 19th century.

"Because it's an invasive species — it doesn't have any local predators [to eat them] — they can grow and multiply quickly and cause excessive damage," Vining said.

Another outbreak starts in 2020

The spring of 2020 will forever be known as the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the state experienced a different outbreak that year.

During its annual survey, the state Department of Agriculture caught a Japanese beetle in Sunnyside in the southeast part of Yakima County.

The beetle, also known by its scientific name, *Popilla japonica*, is named for its Asian country of origin. However, the common Japanese beetle name might be a candidate for review in response to concerns that it stokes anti-Asian and xenophobic sentiments. (See sidebar below.)

However, the beetle has been present in the eastern U.S. for more than 100 years and has established a widespread endemic population in several eastern and midwestern states, such as Michigan.

But the beetle is invasive in the Pacific Northwest, potentially causing ecological and economic harm in a new environment.

The beetle — which has a metallic green exterior and copper wing covers — had been spotted in several Washington counties in previous years. Still, those detections were associated with transport via air cargo and generally hadn't resulted in established populations.

Since Sunnyside, a significant dairy production area, was not close to a major airport, detecting even a single beetle was concerning. And through further trapping efforts, two additional beetle specimens were found in Grandview, near the Grandview Rose Garden, at the end of the 2020 trapping season.

A few months later, an outreach effort for the state's Invasive Species Awareness Week yielded a report from a Grandview resident of the presence of beetles in her flower garden. Then last summer, the state Agriculture Department managed to trap more than 24,000 adult beetles within a 49-square-mile area around the city of Grandview.

And the population of beetles — which fly around during the summer and early fall before dying — is likely bigger since specimens probably escaped the traps, said Camilo Acosta, Japanese beetle eradication coordinator with the Agriculture Department.

The beetle can feed on 300 different plants, making Grandview a prime spot for a population to grow. Grandview growers produce several agricultural commodities, including cherries and hops, harvested during the beetle's prime flight months.

Before dying, an adult beetle can lay upwards of 40 to 60 eggs on the ground. Those eggs hatch in the fall and develop by eating soil and other plant material on the ground during the spring before growing into adult beetles come summer.

The result is an exponential growth in the population, Acosta said.

"The beetle can sustain populations anywhere where it has a food source and a substrate to lay eggs, and that would be anywhere that has some grass," he said.

Such growth is a concern for those in the agricultural industry or organizations or homeowners with landscaping and greenery that immature and adult beetles can feed on.

The larvae, or grubs, can "ugly up a golf course, playground or people's yards," said Doug Walsh, a professor of entomology and integrated pest management coordinator at Washington State University. Walsh is based at WSU's campus in Prosser, just a few miles east of Grandview. "The adults have an extremely wide range of host plants they could feed on, with hops one of the preferred hosts that have been documented back East."

The beetles primarily feed on the leaves of some agricultural products, such as cherries. Those commodities can take minimal feeding, but repeated defoliation could stunt growth and yield.

Beetles also defoliate hops come harvest, but the beetle also strikes in other ways.

For one, the grubs and larvae can feed on the material around the hop bine, the climbing or twining stem of the plant, when it's first planted in the spring, potentially stunting growth.

By the fall months, when harvest comes, the adult beetle feeds on both the plant's leaves and hop cones, said Maggie Elliot, science and technical director of the Hop Growers of America, a Yakima-based organization representing the nation's hop growers.

Walsh said agricultural commodities could also further spread the beetle while being transported.

Minimizing the outbreak

Because the beetle outbreak is limited to a localized area, the state Agriculture Department sees an opportunity to eradicate the beetle population.

To do this, the department plans to spray pesticides over the area. The hope is that beetles developing on the ground ingest the pesticides and die.

"When it's brand new, and if it has not spread throughout an area, you can manage to prevent it from being a [bigger] problem," said David Epstein, vice president for scientific affairs with the Northwest Horticultural Council, a Yakima-based organization that represents tree fruit growers in the Northwest in public policy issues.

Epstein previously worked as a tree fruit entomologist for 20 years and had done fieldwork at Washington State University and Michigan State University, which has done extensive work to manage beetle outbreaks.

It's the first massive effort to eradicate the beetle in the state, said Acosta of the Agriculture Department.

The governor's budget included about \$4.7 million in supplemental funding for eradication and other efforts aimed at containing the outbreak of beetles in the Grandview area.

Other states have been successful in dealing with emerging beetle populations. The Idaho Department of Agriculture effectively eradicated a beetle population developing in downtown Boise. The area had up to 3,000 beetles in 2013. After a multiyear eradication effort, the number of beetles detected dropped to just four in 2018. No beetles were found in 2019, 2020 or 2021. The state agency hopes for a similar result with a new eradication effort in Pocatello.

A successful eradication effort in Washington state would require significant community buy-in. The state Agriculture Department must have consent from 3,500 households within the 49-square-mile area around Grandview where beetles were spotted during trapping last year to spray the pesticides Acelepryn G and Acelepryn on fields, parks, lawns and flower beds.

For the past two months, the department has engaged in a massive outreach effort that has included mailers, virtual and in-person open houses and door-to-door visits to homes located in an area with the highest number of beetle collections.

As of Tuesday, more than 500 households agreed to spraying. Outreach efforts will continue for several more weeks leading to the start of the eradication process, which will go from April through September.

Acosta said most have generally understood the need for the eradication effort. However, many have voiced concerns about the health impacts of spraying pesticides on their home lawns.

To address the issue, the Agriculture Department has worked with the Washington State Department of Health, which has a designated website to explain the importance of stopping the spread of Japanese beetles and provides information about the two pesticides.

The Department of Health says both pesticides have an excellent safety record and lists additional precautions one could take, including avoiding sprayed areas for several hours and washing any clothes that come into contact with the pesticides.

The Agriculture Department would also continue trapping adult beetles to monitor whether the outbreak has spread. To determine this, the department would expand the boundary of the trapping area and increase the number of traps used. The trapping season goes from May to October, coinciding with the peak flight of adult beetles.

The Agriculture Department won't know the initial effectiveness of the eradication effort until at least the end of the 2023 trapping season. By then, the department can factor in the 2022 eradication season, Acosta said.

Meanwhile, the department hopes to complete rule-making on an interior quarantine, which would regulate the agricultural items transported out of the infected area in the coming months. The effort aims to limit the beetle's spread while the state works on eradicating the beetle population in Grandview.

Part of that process is looking into potential economic impacts on businesses.

For example, the proposed language for hops says that any crop transported out of the quarantine area would have to be sprayed with Coragen, an insecticide known to be effective in controlling pests. That creates an additional expense in labor and materials for growers already experiencing increased production costs, said Elliot of the Hop Growers of America.

As a result, the organization has proposed an option to waive the requirement to spray Coragen for hops harvested from a field free of Japanese beetles, Elliot said.

Still, even if hops within the area are required to be sprayed with Coragen as part of the quarantine, there is some good news: The pesticide's use is allowed in countries that import Washington-grown hops, Elliot said.

And the use of the pesticide has proved to be harmonious with other integrated pest management efforts in areas with a similar population of beetles.

"You don't want to introduce a new problem," she said.

What's ahead

It will take several years to determine whether the eradication effort is successful.

If, as in other states, the beetle becomes an established pest in the Yakima Valley and elsewhere in the state, it will have an endemic population that needs to be dealt with every year.

The beetle's presence in other states provides some insight into the types of insecticides and practices necessary to prevent damage by the beetle, said Epstein of the Northwest Horticultural Council.

Epstein has seen one positive in working with growers in Michigan for a dozen years. Beetles there tend to congregate in one part of a yard or agricultural area and ignore the rest, he said. Other sites may be able to avoid the beetle entirely.

"It's not something you expect to treat every year or on a routine basis," he said. "It's a spot problem."

Still, eradication of the beetle is ideal. If nothing else, it's one fewer pest for both agricultural producers and hobby gardeners to deal with, said Walsh of Washington State University.

"To be blunt, most farmers, most homeowners don't want to spray [new] insecticides unless they need to," he said. "It's time; it's expense; it's effort."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/03 In the ocean, it is snowing microplastics
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/03/science/ocean-plastic-animals.html
GIST	<p>As long as there has been marine life, there has been marine snow — a ceaseless drizzle of death and waste sinking from the surface into the depths of the sea.</p> <p>The snow begins as motes, which aggregate into dense, flocculent flakes that gradually sink and drift past the mouths (and mouth-like apparatuses) of scavengers farther down. But even marine snow that is devoured will most likely be snowfall once more; a squid's guts are just a rest stop on this long passage to the deep.</p> <p>Although the term may suggest wintry whites, marine snow is mostly brownish or grayish, comprising mostly dead things. For eons, the debris has contained the same things — flecks from plant and animal carcasses, feces, mucus, dust, microbes, viruses — and transported the ocean's carbon to be stored on the seafloor. Increasingly, however, marine snowfall is being infiltrated by microplastics: fibers and fragments of polyamide, polyethylene and polyethylene terephthalate. And this fauxfall appears to be altering our planet's ancient cooling process.</p> <p>Every year, tens of millions of tons of plastic enter Earth's oceans. Scientists initially assumed that the material was destined to float in garbage patches and gyres, but surface surveys have accounted for only about one percent of the ocean's estimated plastic. A recent model found that 99.8 percent of plastic that</p>

entered the ocean since 1950 had sunk below the first few hundred feet of the ocean. Scientists have found 10,000 times more microplastics on the seafloor than in contaminated surface waters.

Marine snow, one of the primary pathways connecting the surface and the deep, appears to be helping the plastics sink. And scientists have only begun to untangle how these materials interfere with deep-sea food webs and the ocean's natural carbon cycles.

"It's not just that marine snow transports plastics or aggregates with plastic," Luisa Galgani, a researcher at Florida Atlantic University, said. "It's that they can help each other get to the deep ocean."

Marine snow-making

The sunlit surface of the sea blooms with phytoplankton, zooplankton, algae, bacteria and other minuscule life, all feeding on sunbeams or one another. As these microbes metabolize, some produce polysaccharides that can form a sticky gel that attracts the lifeless bodies of tiny organisms, small shreds of larger carcasses, shells from foraminifera and pteropods, sand and microplastics, which stick together to form larger flakes. "They are the glue that keeps together all the components of marine snow," Dr. Galgani said.

Marine snowflakes fall at different rates. Smaller ones have a more languid descent — "as slow as a meter a day," said Anela Choy, a biological oceanographer at Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California, San Diego. Bigger particles, such as dense fecal pellets, can sink quicker. "It just skyrockets to the bottom of the ocean," said Tracy Mincer, a researcher at Florida Atlantic University.

Plastic in the ocean is constantly being degraded; even something as big and buoyant as a milk jug will eventually shed and splinter into microplastics. These plastics develop biofilms of distinct microbial communities — the "plastisphere," said Linda Amaral-Zettler, a scientist at the Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research, who coined the term. "We sort of think about plastic as being inert," Dr. Amaral-Zettler said. "Once it enters the environment, it's rapidly colonized by microbes."

Microplastics can host so many microbial hitchhikers that they counteract the natural buoyancy of the plastic, causing their raft to sink. But if the biofilms then degrade on the way down, the plastic could float back up, potentially leading to a yo-yoing purgatory of microplastics in the water column. Marine snow is anything but stable; as flakes free-fall into the abyss, they are constantly congealing and falling apart, rent by waves or predators.

"It's not as simple as: Everything's falling all the time," said Adam Porter, a marine ecologist at the University of Exeter in England. "It's a black box in the middle of the ocean, because we can't stay down there long enough to work out what's going on."

To explore how marine snow and plastics are distributed in the water column, Dr. Mincer has begun to sample deeper waters with a dishwasher-size pump full of filters that dangles on a wire from a research boat. The filters are arranged from big mesh to small to filter out fish and plankton. Running these pumps for 10 hours at a stretch has revealed nylon fibers and other microplastics distributed throughout the water column below the South Atlantic subtropical gyre.

But even with a research boat and its expensive and unwieldy equipment, an individual piece of marine snow is not easily retrieved from deep water in the actual ocean. The pumps often disturb the snow and scatter fecal pellets. And the flakes alone offer little insight into how fast some snows are sinking, which is vital to understanding how long the plastics linger, yo-yo or sink in the water column before settling on the seafloor.

"Is it decades?" Dr. Mincer asked. "Is it hundreds of years? Then we can understand what we're in here for, and what kind of problem this really is."

Instant marine snow

To answer these questions, and work within a budget, some scientists have made and manipulated their own marine snow in the lab.

In Exeter, Dr. Porter collected buckets of seawater from a nearby estuary and loaded the water into continuously rolling bottles. He then sprinkled in microplastics, including polyethylene beads and polypropylene fibers. The constant churning, and a squirt of sticky hyaluronic acid, encouraged particles to collide and stick together into snow.

“We obviously don’t have 300 meters of a tube to make it sink,” Dr. Porter said. “By rolling it, what you’re doing is you’re creating a never-ending water column for the particles to fall through.”

After the bottles rolled for three days, he pipetted out the snow and analyzed the number of microplastics in each flake. His team found that every type of microplastic they tested aggregated into marine snow, and that microplastics such as polypropylene and polyethylene — normally too buoyant to sink on their own — readily sank once incorporated into marine snow. And all the marine snow contaminated with microplastics sank significantly faster than the natural marine snow.

Dr. Porter suggested that this potential change of the speed of the snow could have vast implications for how the ocean captures and stores carbon: Faster snowfalls could store more microplastics in the deep ocean, whereas slower snowfalls could make the plastic-laden particles more available to predators, potentially starving food webs deeper down. “The plastics are a diet pill for these animals,” said Karin Kvale, a carbon cycle scientist at GNS Science in New Zealand.

In experiments in Crete, with funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research program, Dr. Galgani has tried mimicking marine snow on a larger scale. She dropped six mesocosms — huge bags that each contained nearly 800 gallons of seawater and recreated natural water movement — in a large pool. Under these conditions, marine snow formed. “In the field, you mostly make observations,” Dr. Galgani said. “You have so little space and a limited system. In the mesocosm, you are manipulating a natural system.”

Dr. Galgani mixed microplastics into three mesocosms in an attempt to “recreate a sea and maybe a future ocean where you can have a high concentration of plastic,” she said. The mesocosms laden with microplastics produced not just more marine snow but also more organic carbon, as the plastics offered more surfaces for microbes to colonize. All this could seed the deep ocean with even more carbon and alter the ocean’s biological pump, which helps regulate the climate.

“Of course, it’s a very, very big picture,” Dr. Galgani said. “But we have some signals that it can have an effect. Of course, it depends on how much plastic there is.”

A plastic feast

To understand how microplastics might travel through deep-sea food webs, some scientists have turned to creatures for clues.

Every 24 hours, many species of marine organism embark on a synchronized migration up and down in the water column. “They do the equivalent of a marathon every day and night,” Dr. Choy said. Guilherme V.B. Ferreira, a researcher at the Rural Federal University of Pernambuco in Brazil, wondered: “Is it possible they are transporting the plastics up and down?”

Dr. Ferreira and Anne Justino, a doctoral student at the same university, collected vampire squids and midwater squids from a patch of the tropical Atlantic. They found a plethora of plastics in both species: mostly fibers, but also fragments and beads.

This made sense for midwater squids, which migrate toward the surface at night to feed on fish and copepods that eat microplastics directly. But vampire squids, which live in deeper waters with fewer microplastics, had even higher levels of plastic, as well as foam, in their stomachs. The researchers hypothesize that the vampire squids’ primary diet of marine snow, especially meatier fecal pellets, may be funneling plastics into their bellies.

“It’s very concerning,” Ms. Justino said. Dr. Ferreira said: “They are one of the most vulnerable species for this anthropogenic influence.”

Ms. Justino has excavated fibers and beads from the digestive tracts of lanternfish, hatchetfish and other fish that migrate up and down in the mesopelagic, 650 to 3,300 feet down. Some microbial communities that settle on microplastics can bioluminesce, drawing in fish like a lure, said Dr. Mincer.

In the Monterey Bay Canyon, Dr. Choy wanted to understand if certain species of filter feeders were ingesting microplastics and transporting them into food webs in deeper water. “Marine snow is one of the major things that connects food webs across the ocean,” she said.

Dr. Choy zeroed in on the giant larvacean *Bathochordaeus stygius*. The larvacean resembles a tiny tadpole and lives inside a palatial bubble of mucus that can reach up to a meter long. “It’s worse than the grossest booger you’ve ever seen,” Dr. Choy said. When their snot-houses become clogged from feeding, the larvaceans move out and the heavy bubbles sink. Dr. Choy found that these palaces of mucus are crowded with microplastics, which are funneled to the deep along with all their carbon.

Giant larvaceans are found across the world’s oceans, but Dr. Choy emphasized that her work was focused on the Monterey Bay Canyon, which belongs to a network of marine protected areas and is not representative of other, more polluted seas. “It’s one deep bay on one coast of one country,” Dr. Choy said. “Scale up and think about how vast the ocean is, especially the deep water.”

Individual flakes of marine snow are small, but they add up. A model created by Dr. Kvale estimated that in 2010, the world’s oceans produced 340 quadrillion aggregates of marine snow, which could transport as many as 463,000 tons of microplastics to the seafloor each year.

Scientists are still exploring exactly how this plastic snow is sinking, but they do know for sure, Dr. Porter said, that “everything eventually sinks in the ocean.” Vampire squids will live and die and eventually become marine snow. But the microplastics that pass through them will remain, eventually settling on the seafloor in a stratigraphic layer that will mark our time on the planet long after humans are gone.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/03 Dire warning climate change go unheeded
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/apr/03/dire-warning-on-climate-change-is-being-ignored-amid-war-and-economic-turmoil
GIST	<p>Scientists fear that their last-ditch climate warnings are going unheeded amid international turmoil caused by the war in Ukraine, and soaring energy prices.</p> <p>The third segment of the landmark scientific report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – which could be the last comprehensive assessment of climate science to be published while there is still time to avoid the worst ravages of climate breakdown – will be published on Monday, warning that the world is not shifting quickly enough to a low-carbon economy.</p> <p>But the previous instalment of the vast report – known as working group 2 of the IPCC – was published a month ago, just as Russia invaded Ukraine, and received only muted attention, despite warning of catastrophic and irreversible upheavals that can only narrowly be avoided by urgent action now. Scientists told the Observer that Monday’s fresh scientific warning must spur governments to belated action.</p> <p>Deborah Brosnan, adjunct professor of biology at Virginia Tech University in the US and a scientific consultant, told the Observer: “That [working group 2] report was widely anticipated, but completely ignored. Eclipsed mostly by the war in Ukraine, and domestic issues such as inflation, most major media have barely reported let alone analysed the findings.”</p> <p>She said people were shocked by the Ukraine war, and concerned about soaring prices, but that the climate crisis also needed urgent attention. “The war in Ukraine is a terrible tragedy playing out before our eyes,</p>

and families rightly fear being pushed into poverty by inflation. Yet we seem blind to the fact that an even larger and existential crisis is already unfolding today – one that will result in a global humanitarian crisis and on a scale never seen before.”

Daniela Schmidt, professor at Bristol University and one of the lead authors of the working group 2 report, said the world’s current upheavals show how vulnerable we are to the impacts of the climate crisis, already being felt. Policymakers should consider where their resources are allocated, she advised. “Due to the geopolitical challenges, little political capacity is spent on climate action, and vast amounts of funding are allocated to defence,” she told the Observer.

“[But] the current situation also clearly shows people’s widespread vulnerability to climate change.”

Governments have at least been waking up to the problem behind the scenes, said Bob Ward, policy director at the Grantham Institute on Climate Change at the London School of Economics.

“The IPCC report did struggle to gain attention. But while public discussion may have been muted, governments around the world are now studying the details of the report, and particularly its findings about how to make countries, companies and communities more resilient to those consequences of climate change that cannot now be avoided,” Ward said.

The report, due to be published Monday’s will deal with ways governments and the public can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including greater use of renewable energy, growing trees and cutting-edge technology to suck carbon from the air. But its warnings – that the world is failing to deploy these methods at the scale required to limit global heating to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels – will be muted by the bureaucracy of the IPCC’s processes.

The report itself – part 3 of the sixth comprehensive assessment of climate science to be published by the IPCC since its foundation in 1988 – is based on thousands of scientific papers from the last seven years. But the key document published on Monday, the summary for policymakers, could be as short as 20 to 30 pages, consisting of a series of short messages and data.

These messages are subject to intense wrangling by both scientists and governments. Under the IPCC methods, all governments have the right to make changes to the final summary – and some are exercising those rights by toning down findings and vetoing some of the strongest statements.

Saudi Arabia, India, China and a few other countries have sought to make changes that would weaken the final warnings, the Observer understands. Some governments are anxious to avoid policy advice such as cutting subsidies to fossil fuels, even though these are widely espoused by leading authorities. This process of refinement – which has also been a complaint in the previous chapters of the IPCC assessment – is defended by some, as producing a document that all governments must “own”, as they have all had input. But many scientists are growing increasingly frustrated, as it produces a conservative and sometimes watered down document that many feel does not reflect the urgency and shocking nature of the threat.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/01 Record 72 killer whales Salish Sea in a day
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/whale-watchers-spot-72-killer-whales-throughout-salish-sea-single-day-record
GIST	<p>SEATTLE, Wash. - The Pacific Whale Watching Association (PWWA) spotted 72 killer whales on Thursday, setting a new single-day record.</p> <p>According to the PWWA, whale watchers in Washington and southern British Columbia spotted at least 72 Bigg’s killer whales. Ten distinct groups were documented throughout the Salish Sea, ranging as far south as Hood Canal in Puget Sound, and as far north as Vancouver Island’s Campbell River region in British Columbia. The largest group spotted near the San Juan Islands, had 19 killer whales.</p>

	<p>Monika Wieland Shields, director of Orca Behavior Institute on San Juan Island spoke to PWWA to share her excitement:</p> <p><i>"This was an awesome community effort with watchers from Campbell River to Puget Sound contributing sightings and photos. We wonder how long this increase in Bigg's killer whales will continue, but they keep setting records. More than 70 in the region in one day is astounding."</i></p> <p>One of the most recognizable individuals spotted was T63 "Chainsaw", an adult male killer whale born in 1978. Known for his jagged dorsal fin, he and his mom, T65 "Whidbey" were seen in Haro Strait.</p> <p>The PWWA says in the last decade, they've had days documenting 50 to 60 killer whale spotting in a single day, but they keep setting records. Bigg's killer whales eat marine mammals and are thriving in our region, because of an abundance of seals and sea lions.</p>
Return to Top	

Crime, Criminals

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	04/04 Germany arrests extremist; 1991 attack
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/germany-arrests-wing-extremist-fatal-1991-attack-83858058
GIST	<p>BERLIN -- German prosecutors on Monday arrested a right-wing extremist over an arson attack on a home for asylum-seekers more than 30 years ago in which a Ghanaian man was killed.</p> <p>Federal prosecutors said the suspect, a German citizen identified only as Peter S. in line with local privacy rules, is accused of murder, attempted murder and arson leading to death.</p> <p>They said that, on the evening of Sept. 18, 1991, the suspect and far-right acquaintances discussed racist attacks in the eastern town of Hoyerswerda and agreed that they would approve of similar attacks in their own town, Saarlouis in western Germany.</p> <p>After the bar where he met his acquaintances closed, prosecutors said, the suspect went to the residence for asylum-seekers, poured gasoline on the staircase and set it alight.</p> <p>The fire spread quickly. A 27-year-old Ghanaian resident suffered severe burns and smoke inhalation, and died hours later. Two other residents escaped the fire by jumping out of windows, leaving them with broken bones. The other 18 people living in the building escaped unhurt.</p> <p>An initial investigation against persons unknown was dropped after local authorities couldn't find a perpetrator. Years later, new evidence led to the investigation being reopened and then taken over by federal prosecutors, who handle national security cases in Germany.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 Mexico Riviera Maya drug-related violence
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/cancun-tulum-riviera-maya-mexico-drugs-homicides-11648853578?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>TULUM, Mexico—Hours before she was gunned down, Anjali Ryot posted an idyllic video of herself sitting on a hammock by the Caribbean Sea in one of Mexico's hippest resort towns. "Vibing with the ocean," she wrote in her Instagram account.</p> <p>That night, Ms. Ryot, a California-based travel blogger with some 50,000 Instagram followers, was celebrating her 30th birthday with her husband at La Malquerida, a popular restaurant, when two members of a local drug gang spotted a rival ducking inside. They started shooting. Three tourists were wounded. Ms. Ryot and a German tourist were killed.</p>

Cancún and the 81-mile stretch south of the resort to Tulum, known as the Riviera Maya, draw 13 million visitors a year to their lush beaches, golf courses and all-inclusive luxury resorts. The area accounts for nearly half of Mexico's tourism revenue. It's also the scene of an alarming rise in murders, mostly fueled by demand for drugs from the vacationers themselves.

Drug-related violence has caused the homicide rate across Mexico to jump to record levels in recent years. In the rest of the country, the violence often comes from turf wars over control of trafficking routes for drugs headed to the U.S., rather than from tourist demand.

The homicide rate in the Riviera Maya's state of Quintana Roo has nearly quadrupled since 2016, to 37 killings per 100,000 residents, according to government figures. That's more than five times the U.S. rate and above Mexico's average.

The state police chief estimates that more than eight in 10 killings there are linked to drugs. Last year's tally of 651 was more than the homicides in Italy and Spain together.

"Our basic problem is drug demand by tourists," says Oscar Montes de Oca, Quintana Roo's attorney general.

It's an ideal arrangement for the cartels. Rather than risk smuggling drugs to the U.S. and Europe, they cater to American and European tourists looking to buy Mexican-grown pot, Colombian cocaine, ecstasy from Europe or other drugs. The area has become increasingly known as a party destination. Tulum has an estimated 10 drug gangs, the majority linked to the country's biggest drug cartels.

Organized crime has diversified into extortion. Gangs demand payments from many businesses in the area. Those who don't pay risk getting killed or their locales burned down. The head of a local restaurant association recently estimated that 60% of restaurants get an extortion call at least once a day.

"Everyone, and I mean everyone, is paying extortion money. From some of the big hotels to the guy at the corner taco stand," says James Tobin, who heads an alliance of local businessmen concerned with security issues.

Tourists are rarely caught in the crossfire. State officials say the chances of being killed on a trip to the area are roughly one in five million. U.S. ambassador to Mexico Ken Salazar said in early March that Cancun was safe for tourists and pointed out that the U.S. "also has its trouble spots."

The violence, however, is increasingly intruding into the bubble of five-star hotels. In mid-March, tourists on the beach in Cancún's hotel zone found what turned out to be human remains: a spinal cord, a femur and part of a pelvis. Police say the remains could be linked to organized crime.

In January, gunmen entered a beachside club in trendy Playa del Carmen during the day, grabbed the manager and executed him in the bathroom. Investigators believe the manager was killed over the mayor's cancellation of a dayslong music rave there, a move that resulted in lost sales for drug traffickers.

Earlier that month, two Canadians were shot dead in an alleged murder for hire at the Xcaret Hotel, a luxury resort connected to a popular set of parks.

In November, two weeks after the shootout in Tulum that killed Ms. Ryot, hundreds of tourists scrambled to seek shelter in the lobby of the Hyatt Ziva hotel in Puerto Morelos, a few miles south of Cancún, one afternoon. A gunbattle had broken out between rival groups of drug dealers fighting over the right to sell at a rave party for tourists. Police say two drug dealers were killed, including one shot inside a hotel room.

The latest overseas victim came in mid-March, when a 54-year-old British entrepreneur who lived in Playa del Carmen was shot and killed by assassins riding a motorcycle as he drove to a nearby beach area with his 14-year-old daughter, who was slightly wounded. Police have arrested two suspects and have recovered a weapon, state officials say.

The shootings have shaken Mexico's tourism industry, which overall accounts for 7% of Mexico's economy.

"We have to be careful what kind of tourism we ask for," says David Ortiz Mena, the head of the Tulum hotel association. "The kind of tourism we fostered creates drug demand, and where there is demand there will be supply. But the drug dealers don't leave when the party's over and the tourists go home."

Mr. Ortiz and others point to the neighboring state of Yucatán, where the colonial city of Merida and archaeological sites like Chichen-Itza attract tourists looking for culture rather than a rave. The state's murder rate is 1.8 per 100,000, roughly 5% of Quintana Roo's.

In a survey carried out by the Quintana Roo government, 70% of adult visitors to the area said they had come in part for alcohol, drugs or sex, state officials say. The cartels have also turned Cancún into a global hub of sex trafficking, state officials say.

On Playa del Carmen's main drag, La Quinta Avenida (or Fifth Avenue), a visitor was recently offered drugs five times along a four-block stretch. "Hey, buddy, you want weed, coke, molly?" one street seller said in English. Inside clubs, dealers sell drugs openly in the bathrooms.

Tulum has lately become a global hot spot for electronic music, hosting music festivals that stretch for longer than a week and attract tens of thousands of fans, some of whom are referred to as "Tuluminati" for their search for sometimes drug-induced psychedelic transcendence. One favorite drug is tucibi, an amphetamine that has psychedelic effects.

Drug sales from a single festival can earn cartels millions of dollars, officials say, making them more powerful than local government.

One local resident, a foreigner who works as a kind of concierge for tourists coming to music festivals, makes hotel, VIP table and other arrangements for his international clientele. The concierge also sends to clients' cellphones a menu with prices for drugs that they can buy from dealers, with video of a jaguar in the background. A pill of ecstasy goes for \$25. A tiny bag of cocaine fetches \$150, and tucibi \$200.

"There are zero cops, zero soldiers. You can freely have drugs," the concierge says. "In full Covid, I was in a jungle partying with 5,000 people."

One hotel owner said the drug gangs avoid targeting tourists because tourists are their clients. In the weeks following violent incidents where a tourist is involved, there is a surge in cancellations, he said, but the number of visitors soon recovers. Still, he worries that at some point, the resort's reputation could permanently damage business.

Cancún began as a planned tourist Eden 50 years ago, conceived by Mexico's central bank to attract American spending. The bank's technocrats fed data such as weather conditions and the number of mosquitoes and sharks into a computer, and scoured the country's coast for the best place to build the new city. The result was Cancún, where just a handful of people lived at the time.

Within a few years, Miami Beach-like canyons of luxury hotels sprouted on a thin, sandy island where only mangrove trees had grown before.

The money that has swirled around Cancún from its earliest days has long attracted drug cartels, as well as corruption. Mario Villanueva, the state's fourth governor, who was responsible for developing luxury resorts along the Riviera Maya, was convicted on charges of money laundering and drug trafficking in Mexico and pleaded guilty in the U.S. to money laundering. He spent 19 years in prison before being allowed to serve his remaining time under house arrest in 2020. Another former governor, Roberto Borge, has been in prison since 2018 awaiting trial on embezzlement and other charges.

Although drug cartels were present from the early days, they had largely avoided bloody turf wars and high-impact crimes.

For years, Cancún marketed itself as a spring break destination to rival Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and the party scene recently shifted south to Playa del Carmen and Tulum. The pandemic only added to the popularity of the destination and Mexico, unlike other major tourist destinations, never required a negative Covid test to enter. Over the past two years, the area added 11,500 hotel rooms.

The region's growth has far outstripped the Mexican government's capacity to provide services from sewage to schools to police. Tulum, once a hippie destination without electricity, now has 14,000 hotel rooms but still lacks sewage service, so trucks bring in clean water and take out dirty water. For a population of 45,000 residents, and some regular 25,000 visitors, Tulum has fewer than 30 poorly trained police officers and three patrol cars, state officials say.

Officials are trying to turn things around. When Carlos Joaquin, the governor of Quintana Roo, began his term in 2017, the state had just 120 state police, 15 patrol cars and about 20 bulletproof vests. Only 15% of local police had been vetted by a national program that includes a lie-detector test and a psychological profile. Most local police had no training and hadn't fired their weapons in five years.

"I found a state penetrated by organized crime, with very weak institutions," he says.

Since then, state and federal officials have built the first local police academy, boosted pay and given police retirement benefits and life insurance for their families if they are killed in the line of duty. They have vetted more than 80% of local forces, and increased the number of state police to 1,500 officers. Around 2,500 new security cameras along the coast, some with facial recognition technology, have helped authorities make arrests.

In the case of Ms. Ryot, the blogger who was gunned down, the camera system tracked the two suspects who fired into the restaurant as they fled the scene, first on foot and then in an orange Chevrolet. State police officials then sent up drones to track the nearby working-class neighborhoods until they found the car parked outside a home. Police raided the home, arrested the two men, and seized 16 kilos of cocaine and 23 guns, says state attorney general Óscar Montes de Oca.

Many drug gangs have even taken over large stretches of beaches, say state officials. The process to establish territory starts with local women selling trinkets on the beach. Then others move in, selling food and later renting out beach chairs by the day, installing massage tents, and offering alcohol and drugs. If hotels complain, they are threatened.

"We need to recover the beaches," says Raul Tassinari, the 53-year-old police chief of Playa del Carmen. The state government is setting up informal police tents every few kilometers, staffed with members of Mexico's National Guard, and state and local police.

Lili Campos, Playa del Carmen's new mayor and a former state criminal prosecutor, increased the number of police patrol cars from 15 to 226 for this city of some 400,000 people. Ms. Campos says she has installed more than 500 cameras in the heart of the tourist district, and cleaned out the informal street vendors that once made walking almost impossible on the city's main avenue. She has had death threats. "I don't sleep in the same place twice," she says.

Local officials say they want to avoid following in the footsteps of Acapulco, which briefly became the world's murder capital due to cartel feuds. The number of foreign visitors dropped by two-thirds between 2012 and 2017 and still hasn't recovered.

"I'm sure we won't become another Acapulco," says Mr. Joaquin, the state governor. "We have so much more money, resources and awareness of the problem. We have to get this right."

HEADLINE	04/02 FOP: 101 officers shot in line of duty 2022
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/101-police-officers-shot-in-line-of-duty-a-43-increase-from-2021-national-fraternal-order-of-police
GIST	<p>The National Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), the world's largest organization of law enforcement officers, has counted 101 officers shot in the line of duty as of April 1, including 17 fatally, so far in 2022.</p> <p>The latest figure marks a 43% increase compared to the number of officers shot at the same time period in 2021 and a 63% increase compared to 2020, FOP reports.</p> <p>"We are in the midst of a real crisis. The violence directed at law enforcement officers is unlike anything I've seen in my 36 years of law enforcement," National FOP President Patrick Yoes said in a Friday statement. "Last year was one of the most dangerous years for law enforcement, with more officers shot in the line of duty since the National Fraternal Order of Police began recording this data."</p> <p>He added that FOP's data so far in 2022 indicates that "we are outpacing last year's numbers of officers shot and killed in the line of duty."</p> <p>"It is important to remember that when we look at these numbers, they represent people who are fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters," he said. "We must also be aware that the lethality of these attacks would be much greater but for dramatic improvements in medical trauma science and anti-ballistic technology."</p> <p>Of those 101 officers shot so far, 19 were shot in ambush-style attacks, representing a 36% increase from 2021, according to FOP. Those 19 ambush attacks resulted in 32 officers shot, five of whom were killed.</p> <p>In one example that captured the nation's attention in January, New York Police Department Officer Wilbert Mora, a 27, and Detective Jason Rivera, 22, were fatally shot while also responding to a domestic dispute.</p> <p>Less than a month later, nine police officers were wounded during a Feb. 11 shootout in Phoenix while responding to a domestic dispute that resulted in the deaths of a suspect and a female victim.</p> <p>The five states with the highest number of officers killed so far this year are: Arizona, Texas, New York, Georgia and Washington state.</p> <p>"This violence is completely unacceptable," Yoes said. "It's a stain on our society, and it must end. It is incumbent upon our elected officials and community leaders to stand up and speak out against the violence against law enforcement officers."</p> <p>In 2021 alone, the FOP counted a "historic" 346 officers shot in the line of duty — 63 of whom were killed. That number was up from 312 officers shot in 2020, 47 of whom were killed, and 293 shot in 2019, 50 of whom were killed, according to an FOP analysis.</p> <p>Last year, the five states with the highest numbers of officers shot in the line of duty were Texas, Illinois, California, Georgia and Florida.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 Dallas concert shooting: 1 dead, 11 injured
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/1-dead-11-others-injured-after-shooting-at-texas-concert-officials-say-dallas-police-department-kealon-dejuane-gilmore-gunshots-injuries-violence
GIST	DALLAS (TND) – One person is dead and 11 others are injured after a shooting late Saturday at a concert in Texas.

	<p>Police responded to reports of a shooting around midnight at a trail ride and concert event in Dallas.</p> <p>Upon arrival, 26-year-old Kealon Dejuane Gilmore was found near the stage with a gunshot wound to the head. He was pronounced dead at the scene.</p> <p>Police said a preliminary investigation revealed an unknown person fired a gun into the air and another unknown individual fired into the direction of the crowd.</p> <p>11 people were taken to the hospital, with one of those victims in critical condition.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	04/03 Uptick in western WA highway shootings
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/uptick-in-western-washington-highway-shootings-continues-in-i-5-multi-car-incident/281-8aec96e-3a4f-4cbb-89b4-0ba1e360bb18
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Saturday's shooting on I-5 north near I-405 in Tukwila adds to the growing list of violent incidents happening on highways throughout Western Washington.</p> <p>State troopers are staying busy on freeways in Western Washington, responding to yet another shooting Saturday afternoon that sent one person to the hospital. According to the State Patrol, there have already been 20 freeway shootings in King County since the beginning of the year. That number is nearly half of the number of shootings that occurred all of last year in the county.</p> <p>"These types of situations are happening more and more, and they are really needless situations," said Trooper Allen.</p> <p>This disturbing trend is also being seen by troopers in Pierce County. They said there have been at least 23 highway shootings in their county since January. Which is alarming, considering there were a total of 31 shootings on the highway in Pierce County in 2021.</p> <p>"A lot of these incidents occur as a result from some form of hand motions, facial expressions, honking or other driving behaviors that push a button here," said Trooper Robert Reyer with the Washington State Patrol.</p> <p>He believes a contributing factor could be the fact there are more drivers on the road now than there were last year. So, he encourages drivers to be more courteous and to do their best not to react to other driver's actions.</p> <p>"You don't want to risk it just for a split second decision to be mad at somebody, you don't want to risk your own life or the life of somebody else that could get shot," said Trooper Reyer.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	04/03 Rural South Carolina: 5 injured in shooting
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/03/us/colleton-south-carolina-shooting-injured/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)Five people were injured Friday night in a shooting along a rural road in South Carolina.</p> <p>The Colleton County Sheriff's Office responded to a call around 11:30 "regarding people shooting at each other" on Logan Farm Road, police said on Twitter.</p> <p>When they arrived to what was described as a "rural one lane dirt road," law enforcement officials found five people with gunshot wounds, according to Colleton County Fire-Rescue.</p> <p>"Dispatchers were having problems obtaining information from the chaotic scene," the fire department said in a press release. "Some occupants went to a house near the location and other injured parties ran south on Logan Farm Road to escape."</p>

	<p>The victims included four males and one female 17 to 33, according to Colleton County Fire-Rescue.</p> <p>They were taken to a hospital for further treatment, police said. One is in critical but stable condition, according to police.</p> <p>It is unclear what led to the shooting or if law enforcement agencies have made any arrests.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 Fentanyl deaths in US keep rising
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/fentanyl-deaths-keep-rising-states-look-for-solutions-d3ccd6edfdc6516b3ea07943c7e46544
GIST	<p>As the addiction and overdose crisis that has gripped the U.S. for two decades turns even deadlier, state governments are scrambling for ways to stem the destruction wrought by fentanyl and other synthetic opioids.</p> <p>In statehouses across the country, lawmakers have been considering and adopting laws on two fronts: reducing the risk to users and increasing the penalties for dealing fentanyl or mixing it with other drugs. Meanwhile, Republican state attorneys general are calling for more federal action, while some GOP governors are deploying National Guard units with a mission that includes stopping the flow of fentanyl from Mexico.</p> <p>“It’s a fine line to help people and try to get people clean, and at the same time incarcerate and get the drug dealers off the streets,” said Nathan Manning, a Republican state senator in Ohio who is sponsoring legislation to make it clear that materials used to test drugs for fentanyl are legal.</p> <p>The urgency is heightened because of the deepening impact of the drugs. Last year, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported the nation had hit a grim milestone. For the first time, more than 100,000 Americans had died of drug overdoses over a 12-month period. About two-thirds of the deaths were linked to fentanyl and other synthetic drugs, which can be 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine, heroin or prescription opioids.</p> <p>The recent case of five West Point cadets who overdosed on fentanyl-laced cocaine during spring break in Florida put the dangers and pervasiveness of the fentanyl crisis back in the spotlight.</p> <p>The chemical precursors to the drugs are being shipped largely from China to Mexico, where much of the illicit fentanyl supply is produced in labs before being smuggled into the U.S.</p> <p>While users sometimes seek out fentanyl specifically, it and other synthetics with similar properties are often mixed with other drugs or formed into counterfeit pills so users often don’t know they’re taking it.</p> <p>Advocates say test strips can help prevent accidental overdoses of drugs laced with fentanyl. The strips are given out at needle exchanges and sometimes at concerts or other events where drugs are expected to be sold or used.</p> <p>Thomas Stuber, chief legislative officer at The LCADA Way, a drug treatment organization in Ohio that serves Lorain County and nearby areas, has been pushing for the test strip legislation. It also would ease access to naloxone, a drug that can be used to revive people when they’re having opioid overdoses.</p> <p>“This is a harm-reduction approach that has received a lot of acceptance,” he said. “We cannot treat somebody if they’re dead.”</p> <p>Since last year, at least a half-dozen states have enacted similar laws and at least a dozen others have considered them, according to research by the National Conference of State Legislatures.</p>

In West Virginia, the state hardest hit by opioids per capita, lawmakers passed a bill this month to legalize the testing strips. It now heads to the governor.

The measure was sponsored by Republican lawmakers. But state Delegate Mike Pushkin, a Democrat whose district includes central Charleston, has also been pushing for more access to fentanyl strips. He said the situation got worse last year when a state law tightened regulations on needle exchanges, causing some of them to close.

Pushkin, who also is in long-term addiction recovery, is pleased with passage of the testing strip bill but upset with another measure passed this month that would increase the penalties for trafficking fentanyl. That bill also would create a new crime of adding fentanyl to another drug.

“Their initial reaction is, ‘We have to do something,’” he said. “It’s not just about doing something, it’s about doing the right thing that actually has results.”

But for many lawmakers, making sure that tough criminal penalties apply to fentanyl is a priority.

California Assemblywoman Janet Nguyen, a Republican, introduced a measure that would make penalties for dealing fentanyl just as harsh as those for selling cocaine or heroin. The Republican represents Orange County, where there were more than 600 reported fentanyl-related deaths last year.

“This is sending messages to those who aren’t afraid of selling these drugs that there’s a longer, bigger penalty than you might think,” said Nguyen, whose bill failed to advance from her chamber’s public safety committee in a 5-2 vote last week. She said after the bill failed that she was considering trying again.

She said committee members stressed compassion for drug users, something she said she agrees with.

“The less available these pills are out there, the better it is,” Nguyen said. “And that is going after the drug dealer.”

The same day her measure failed to advance, a Democratic lawmaker in California announced a different bill to increase fentanyl-dealing penalties.

The National Conference of State Legislatures found 12 states with fentanyl-specific drug trafficking or possession laws as of last year. Similar measures have been introduced or considered since the start of 2021 in at least 19 states, the Associated Press found in an analysis of bills compiled by LegiScan. That does not include measures to add more synthetic opioids to controlled substance lists to mirror federal law; those have been adopted in many states, with bipartisan support.

Fentanyl has been in the spotlight in Colorado since February, when five people were found dead in a suburban Denver apartment from overdoses of fentanyl mixed with cocaine.

Under state law, possession with intent to distribute less than 14 grams of fentanyl is an offense normally punishable by two to four years in prison. But fentanyl is so potent that 14 grams can represent up to 700 lethal doses, under a calculation used by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency.

“It’s making it impossible to hold the dealer accountable for the deadliness of the drugs they’re peddling,” Colorado House Speaker Alec Garnett, a Democrat, said in an interview.

He and a bipartisan group of lawmakers last week unveiled a bill also backed by Democratic Gov. Jared Polis that would increase penalties for dealers with smaller amounts of fentanyl and in cases where the drug leads to a death. The legislation also would increase the accessibility of naloxone and test strips while steering people who possess fentanyl into education and treatment programs.

Maritza Perez, director of national affairs at the Drug Policy Alliance, a group that advocates for harm-reduction measures, is skeptical of the legislation that would increase criminal penalties.

“We have the largest incarceration rate in the entire world and we’re also setting records in terms of overdose deaths,” she said.

Democratic governors are focusing primarily on harm reduction methods. Among them is Illinois Gov. Jay Pritzker, who released a broad overdose action plan last month.

Several Republican governors and attorneys general have responded to the rising death toll with administrative enforcement efforts and by pushing for more federal intervention.

Last year, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey called for states to help secure the border with Mexico. Along with trying to keep people from entering the U.S., stopping the flow of fentanyl was cited as a reason. Several other Republican governors have sent contingents of state troopers or National Guard units.

The Texas Military Department said that from March 2021 through earlier this month, its troops near the border confiscated more than 1,200 pounds (540 kilograms) of fentanyl. By comparison, federal authorities reported confiscating about 11,000 pounds (4,990 kilograms) in 2021 — still a fraction of what entered the country.

Last year, the U.S. Department of Justice filed about 2,700 cases involving crimes related to the distribution of fentanyl and similar synthetic drugs, up nearly tenfold from 2017. Even so, Republican state officials are critical of federal efforts to stop fentanyl from entering the country.

In January, 16 GOP state attorneys general sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken calling on him to exert more pressure on China and Mexico to stop the flow of fentanyl. Those are steps that Dr. Rahul Gupta, the director of National Drug Control Policy, said are already being taken.

In March, West Virginia Attorney General Patrick Morrisey called on U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland for more enforcement on fentanyl trafficking and harsher penalties.

“Fentanyl is killing Americans of all walks of life in unprecedented numbers,” Morrisey said in a statement emailed to the AP, “and the federal government must respond with full force, across the board, using every tool available to stem the tide of death.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/03 Hundreds of NYC prosecutors leaving jobs
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/03/nyregion/why-hundreds-of-new-york-city-prosecutors-are-leaving-their-jobs.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=New%20York
GIST	<p>New York City’s prosecutors are leaving in droves, citing pandemic burnout, low salaries and two intersecting laws that fundamentally changed the nature of their jobs.</p> <p>“They just simply can’t do it anymore,” Darcel Clark, the Bronx district attorney, said in a Friday interview. “The money is not where it should be, and the work-life balance is just unmanageable.”</p> <p>This year alone, 36 have left the Brooklyn district attorney’s office and 44 Manhattan’s. At least 28 have left the Bronx, and the nine Staten Island assistant district attorneys who have left this year represented about 10 percent of that office’s prosecutorial staff. The Queens office told the New York City Council that it was on track this year to more than double last year’s resignations.</p> <p>In the past year, the Manhattan and Brooklyn district attorneys, who have about 500 prosecutors each, lost almost a fifth of that work force, a sharp increase from attrition averages before 2020. The Bronx is shedding lawyers at a similar pace, a total of 104 since July.</p>

The district attorneys are replacing their previous employees when they can, often exchanging experienced prosecutors for untested ones.

When the pandemic arrived in New York two years ago, it disrupted nearly all court proceedings. At the same time, two new state laws took effect governing discovery — the sharing of all evidence, potential evidence and other case-related material. Prosecutors say the measures, which were intended to make trials fairer to defendants, create onerous amounts of paperwork.

The first law requires prosecutors to obtain and hand over hundreds of documents on many cases, a demanding task that can impede interviewing witnesses and otherwise preparing for court. A second law ties the handover of that material to the speedy trial clock, creating deadline pressure for prosecutors to collect all the material once charges are filed. (That law is known as Kalief’s law, named for Kalief Browder, a teenager who committed suicide after being held on Rikers Island for three years without a trial.)

For instance, if a defendant blew into a breathalyzer, a defense attorney is entitled to six months worth of calibration reports on that device. Prosecutors also have a continuing obligation to hand over a similar number of calibration reports filed after the defendant used the device.

The new laws aren’t the only reason for departures. District attorneys say that their city-funded budgets are too thin to allow them to pay prosecutors competitively. Despite the cost of living in Manhattan and Brooklyn, starting salaries for prosecutors in those boroughs is \$72,000. In the Bronx it is \$75,121.

And, of course, the trend has coincided with the pandemic, which has caused record numbers of voluntary resignations across all industries.

District attorneys say their employees are struggling. Ms. Clark said her office’s lawyers, inundated with paperwork, could make \$30,000 more doing similar tasks for law firms, which might also let them work from home. “Why not do that?” she said.

State lawmakers rewrote the discovery law in 2019 after defense attorneys said that prosecutors were withholding key evidence. The previous law required them to turn over certain evidence only after defense attorneys had requested it in writing.

Because defendants — a disproportionate number of whom are people of color — were not privy to the full scope of the evidence against them, they often accepted plea deals, rather than risk going to trial.

“The defense bar was basically completely in the dark about what the case was even about,” said John P. Buza, a former prosecutor at the Manhattan district attorney’s office who now practices defense law as a partner at Konta, Georges & Buza, P.C.

Public defenders argued that without pressure on prosecutors to turn over exculpatory facts, their clients were perpetually at risk of wrongful conviction.

The discovery law changed that. Prosecutors are now obligated to turn over 21 kinds of material, including all electronically created or stored information relevant to a case.

Prosecutors now must hustle to obtain reams of paperwork — much of it produced by the New York Police Department — and submit it to defense attorneys or risk seeing a case tossed out. Prosecutors often work as many as 100 cases simultaneously, and a large percentage of their cases now generate significant paperwork.

Ms. Clark said that the workload had led to immense pressure on her assistants, who “feel that their cases are going to get dismissed or that I’m going to fire them.”

“When they have all this pressure on them, they’d rather go somewhere else where their quality of life is better,” she said. “They don’t have to work nights, weekends, holidays and do all this discovery.”

Caitlin Nolan, an 11-year veteran of the Manhattan district attorney’s office, said in an interview Friday that she started looking for a new job last spring, amid the challenges of working on a low salary, the everyday difficulties of the pandemic and frustration with the new laws. She left the office in January.

“It was difficult to comply with because there was so much we were expected to produce,” she said, adding that having to provide information about witnesses — who would express concern to her about defendants knowing their identities ahead of a trial — was particularly nerve-racking.

In recent testimony submitted to the New York City Council, the Manhattan district attorney, Alvin Bragg illustrated the burden. He reported that before 2020, his office used about 32 terabytes of data storage. Today, it uses 320 terabytes, a 900 percent increase over two years.

Tina Luongo, the attorney in charge of the criminal defense practice at the Legal Aid Society, said that she agreed that prosecutors — and public defenders — needed more money for competitive salaries, particularly in light of the discovery laws.

“High workloads, even high workloads for public defenders, diminish morale. I’m not going to deny that,” she said, adding that she expected the state to provide local prosecutors with tens of millions of dollars for staffing in its coming budget.

But, she said, “It cannot be the case and it must not be the case that the way you solve a workload problem is to diminish the rights of somebody accused of a crime.”

Mr. Buza said that his former colleagues are not saying that the principles underlying the new laws are unjust or misguided, but are simply overwhelmed by the way the job overall has changed, with the need to chase down documents for which they are legally responsible — even if they might not be aware such materials exist.

“People go into the job because they have an idea as to what it means to be a prosecutor and go into court and try cases, and they end up just basically uploading discovery,” he said.

Last month, Gov. Kathy Hochul proposed changes to the discovery law that would prevent a judge from dismissing a case if a prosecutor was in “substantial compliance” with discovery obligations. Ms. Luongo said that various counterproposals were under negotiation.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	04/02 Sentence: 650yrs; brutal 1980s sex crimes
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/02/us/steven-ray-hessler-sentenced-shelby-county-rape-cases.html
GIST	<p>For decades, the police in Shelby County, Ind., could not identify the man who broke into houses at night, armed with a knife or a gun, woke his victims, and then bound and sexually tortured them. He often disguised himself in a bulky coat and covered his face with a ski mask or leggings.</p> <p>Then, in 2020, 35 years after his last known assault in the county, investigators were finally able to identify the attacker as Steven Ray Hessler, and arrest him. The breakthrough came, prosecutors said, when DNA extracted from the envelope of a water bill that Mr. Hessler had licked matched DNA that had been left at the scene of his last known crime in the county, on Aug. 17, 1985.</p> <p>On Friday, Mr. Hessler, 59, was sentenced to 650 years in prison. The sentence came a month after a jury convicted Mr. Hessler of two counts of rape, six counts of unlawful deviate conduct, seven counts of burglary resulting in bodily injury, three counts of criminal deviate conduct and one count of robbery.</p>

James B. Landwerlen, the prosecutor in Shelby County, southeast of Indianapolis, said that from Aug. 14, 1982, to Aug. 17, 1985, Mr. Hessler brutally assaulted 10 victims: seven women, a 16-year-old girl, and two men, including a former Marine whom he had handcuffed, hogtied and beat with a gun, leaving him in a coma for months.

“Steven Ray Hessler is one of the most evil, dangerous, sadistic predators that I’ve had the pleasure of prosecuting” in a career of more than 30 years, Mr. Landwerlen said in a statement.

Mr. Landwerlen credited the victims for testifying to some of the torment they had endured at the hands of Mr. Hessler. “These attacks have had profound impacts on their lives,” he said, describing Mr. Hessler’s victims as “living in a recurring state of fear.”

Mr. Hessler plans to appeal his conviction, according to his lawyer, Bryan L. Cook, who attacked the investigation.

“Several potentially viable suspects were ruled out by DNA, although eight of 10 victims were not DNA cases — which was a central issue in the case,” Mr. Cook said. “Many physical descriptions by victims of the attacker did not match Hessler’s age, build, weight, eye color or education.”

Mr. Cook said that there had been 80 to 100 suspects over the years, including a cousin of Mr. Hessler’s who was charged with four of the attacks, and a convict who had committed similar crimes in the 1970s and was the inspiration for a Frank Zappa song, “The Illinois Enema Bandit.”

“Several psychics were involved, one parading through a crime scene before police even processed the scene,” Mr. Cook said. “Potentially critical evidence from some scenes was lost or destroyed over the years.”

Mr. Landwerlen said Mr. Hessler was “generally very cautious,” wiping down crime scenes and taking items that he had touched with him.

In 1990, Mr. Hessler was convicted of rape in neighboring Decatur County, Ind., and served about 10 years in prison, Mr. Landwerlen said. He was released about two months before inmates were required to submit DNA samples, Mr. Landwerlen said.

Mr. Hessler wasn’t linked to the assaults in Shelby County until investigators sent DNA from the last local crime scene, in 1985, to Parabon NanoLabs, a company in Virginia that uses DNA technology to help solve cold cases.

In 2020, the company identified Mr. Hessler as one of two potential suspects, which led investigators to subpoena a utility company for Mr. Hessler’s water bill so that they could extract his DNA from the envelope, Mr. Landwerlen said.

After the DNA on the envelope matched the DNA from the 1985 crime scene, investigators later obtained another DNA sample from Mr. Hessler’s cheek, which confirmed the link, Mr. Landwerlen said.

Investigators searched Mr. Hessler’s home on Aug. 17, 2020, exactly 35 years after his final known attack, and found further evidence linking him to the decades-old assaults, including photographs that had been stolen from a victim, coats with ski masks in the pockets, and handcuffs, Mr. Landwerlen said.

A search of Mr. Hessler’s computers showed he had tracked two of his victims online, and had downloaded a photo of the house in Georgia where one of them lived, Mr. Landwerlen said.

Investigators also found about 30 pairs of women’s underwear in individual bags at Mr. Hessler’s home. He had stolen underwear from some of his victims, but they could not identify any of the underwear as theirs after so many years, Mr. Landwerlen said.

	When Mr. Hessler was convicted after an eight-day jury trial last month, several of the victims came to court to hear the verdict read aloud. "They are extremely pleased with the convictions," Mr. Landwerlen said, "knowing that they finally no longer have to live in fear of this dangerous, dangerous man."
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/02 FBI: arrest; threats to Texas senator
SOURCE	https://www.chronline.com/stories/washington-man-arrested-by-fbi-charged-with-making-threats-to-sen-ted-cruz,287226
GIST	<p>Federal agents have arrested and charged a Washington man for threatening the life of Texas Sen. Ted Cruz.</p> <p>Eric Kikkert appeared Friday afternoon in Seattle before U.S. Magistrate Judge S. Kate Vaughan, who ordered him held pending a preliminary hearing April 15 before Magistrate Judge Michelle Peterson.</p> <p>A six-page complaint filed Friday and signed by FBI Special Agent Caryn Highley of the Seattle FBI Office alleges Kikkert, a military veteran, sent threatening, "nonsensical" emails to the U.S. Capitol and traveled to Washington, D.C., on March 10, where he was questioned at a hotel by agents of the U.S. Secret Service.</p> <p>On March 21, the complaint says, a man calling from Kikkert's number contacted Cruz's office "and stated that the Senator either could 'answer my questions by giving me a call or at the end of my rifle.'"</p> <p>On March 22, the complaint says an individual showed Capitol Police a text from Kikkert's phone that included a photograph of Kikkert from his time in the military, holding a rifle and with a caption that threatened the Republican senator's life.</p> <p>That same day, Cruz's office reported a series of voicemails in which an individual who identified himself as Kikkert threatened to kill Cruz.</p> <p>According to the complaint, on March 18, Kikkert was stopped by state police in Maryland, where he was cited for trespassing at the Hagerstown Speedway racetrack. That same day he allegedly left a rambling voicemail with the office of the Architect of the Capitol's Office of Inspector General, in which he threatened to form a militia and "enforce the Constitution myself."</p> <p>In a March 18 Facebook post, Kikkert purportedly wrote he wanted to buy a handgun, a shotgun and an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle. The complaint says Kikkert has a felony conviction and is prohibited from owning firearms.</p> <p>The complaint says Kikkert's mother said he has mental health problems and has refused to take his medication. She told law enforcement her son had been trying to obtain body armor. She reported the Facebook post to the Capitol Police, the complaint says.</p> <p>Kikkert has a Vancouver address. The complaint says the calls made to Cruz's office were routed through a Kent cellphone tower.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/03 Sacramento shooting: 6 dead, 9 injured
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/sacramento-police-says-multiple-victims-reported-in-shooting/
GIST	<p>SACRAMENTO, Calif (AP) — Police in California say six people are dead and at least nine others have been injured after a shooting in downtown Sacramento.</p> <p>The Sacramento Police Department says the shooting happened early Sunday morning.</p>

	<p>Video posted on Twitter showed people running through the street as the sound of rapid gunfire could be heard in the background. Video showed multiple ambulances had been sent to the scene.</p> <p>Police provided few details about the circumstances surrounding the shooting but said in a tweet that a “large police presence will remain and the scene remains active.” Phone messages seeking comment were left with the Sacramento police.</p> <p>Residents were asked to avoid the area, which is packed with restaurants and bars that leads to the Golden One Center, where the Sacramento Kings play basketball.</p> <p>Phone messages seeking comment were left with the Sacramento police.</p> <p>Berry Accius, a community activist, said he came to the scene shortly after the shooting happened.</p> <p>“The first thing I saw was like victims. I saw a young girl with a whole bunch of blood in her body, a girl taking off glass from her, a young girl screaming saying, ‘They killed my sister.’ A mother running up, ‘Where’s my son, has my son been shot?’” he said.</p> <p>“You know, commotion, trauma. It’s just a lot of things that, you know, you don’t want to see.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	04/02 Virginia mall shooting: 1 killed, 2 wounded
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/police-1-killed-2-wounded-in-shooting-at-virginia-mall/
GIST	<p>NORFOLK, Va. (AP) — A man was killed and two women were wounded in a shooting at a Virginia mall Saturday evening, police said.</p> <p>Norfolk police were called to MacArthur Center around 6:25 p.m., the department said in a news release. The women, who were shot in their ankles, were taken to a hospital with injuries that weren’t believed to be life-threatening.</p> <p>Police Chief Larry Boone told news outlets that the shooting was prompted by an argument over money, and that he believed the male victim and the suspect were related. Boone said he didn’t know if the two women had any relationship to the shooter or the man who was killed.</p> <p>The the victims’ names weren’t immediately released.</p> <p>Several area roads were blocked off as authorities investigated. Police shared photos later Saturday night of a suspect and a person of interest, asking for the public’s help in identifying them.</p> <p>The shooting happened on the same day as the funeral for 25-year-old Virginian-Pilot reporter Sierra Jenkins, who was one of two people killed less than two blocks from the shopping center on March. 19. Authorities say Jenkins was caught in a crossfire as she was leaving a bar.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	04/02 Seattle grim mark: 13 homicides into 2022
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/not-seeing-it-slow-down-at-all-seattle-hits-grim-mark-of-13-homicides-in-1st-quarter-of-2022/
GIST	<p>Three months into the year, violent crime in Seattle has already claimed 13 lives, accounting for half of the 26 homicides committed in King County in the first quarter of 2022.</p> <p>That sad tally has broken a six-year-old record, when 12 of the 23 homicides committed countywide happened within Seattle city limits during the first quarter of 2016.</p>

Four of this year's killings in Seattle were committed in a single week, from March 17 to 24. Ten of this year's homicide victims died from gunshot wounds and all were males, although not all have been identified.

"We're not seeing it slow down at all," Assistant Chief Deanna Nollette, commander of SPD's Criminal Investigations Bureau, said in a Thursday phone interview.

"We haven't even gotten to summer yet. So yeah, we're concerned," added Lt. Jason Verhoff, who leads the department's homicide unit and was on the call with Nollette. "Historically, we always see an uptick in violent crime in summer months so we've come to expect that."

Police departments across the country reported spikes in violent crime during the pandemic — and Seattle was no exception. Though homicides are only one measure of violent crime, 2020 ended with 53 people dead by violence in the city, 20 more than in 2019. Last year, Seattle police investigated 41 homicides.

In King County, there was a total of 73 homicides in 2019, 116 in 2020 and 110 in 2021.

Those numbers are based on data tracking homicides in King County since 2016, compiled by The Seattle Times with information from police, prosecutors and the King County Medical Examiner's Office.

But unlike this year, homicides committed in Seattle in the first quarters of 2019, 2020 and 2021 were all in the single digits — eight, nine and eight, respectively. Before that, there were two homicides committed in the city between January and March 2017 and seven during the same period in 2018.

According to the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, senior deputy prosecutors assigned to the Most Dangerous Offender Program have been called out to homicide or violent assault scenes 40 times in the first quarter of 2022, as of Wednesday. That's more than double the number of callouts in the first quarters of every year since 2016.

The dangerous offender program was established in 1994 and since then, senior deputy prosecutors have responded to every homicide and potential homicide scene in King County, Casey McNerthney, a spokesperson for the office, said in an email.

Though prosecutors are separate from police investigators, their presence at a crime scene allows them to assist detectives with writing warrants, noting what kinds of forensic testing may be helpful, and enabling them to have a deeper understanding of cases they will eventually handle in court, he wrote.

Last year's 140 MDOP callouts were down slightly from 2020, when prosecutors were summoned to 146 crime scenes. There were 90 callouts in 2019; 100 in 2018; 89 in 2017; and 68 in 2016.

The prosecutor's office also tracks shootings in the county through its Shots Fired Project and releases quarterly data of shootings that result in death, injury or property damage, as well as those that don't but where there is physical evidence, like shell casings, that a shooting occurred. The Shots Fired data for the first quarter of 2022 is expected to be released in coming weeks and will include victim breakdowns for age, sex and race.

Last year, 88 people were fatally shot and 372 were wounded by gunfire in King County, surpassing 2020's record high of 69 firearm-related homicides and 268 shooting injuries that were largely attributed to the stressors of the pandemic.

Though it's impossible to predict how this year might end, Nollette said reports of shots fired are at an all-time high in Seattle.

The ongoing violence has made for heavy caseloads across the homicide unit, which is down 14% in terms of staffing and whose detectives are also responsible for investigating aggravated assaults, assaults on police officers and felony harassment cases, according to Nollette and Verhoff.

	<p>This year, as in recent years, “the single biggest increase is in homicides with a homeless nexus,” where the victim, suspect, or both are experiencing homelessness, or a killing occurs in a homeless encampment, Nollette said.</p> <p>Those cases account for an estimated 40% of the homicide unit’s case load — and that nexus was evident in three of the four homicides committed during that single week in March, she said.</p> <p>“When I say ‘homeless,’ it’s a misnomer — it’s really narcotics activity, mental health issues and lawlessness,” said Nollette. “We’re seeing the violence centered on illegal encampments, where there’s a general sense of lawlessness that concentrates bad actors and concentrates narcotics in one area.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/02 Rolling gun battle on I-5: crash, arrests
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/suspect-in-custody-after-shooting-on-i-5-in-tukwila-that-snarled-traffic
GIST	<p>TUKWILA, Wash. — Two suspects were in custody after upwards of 12 rounds were fired Saturday afternoon in the northbound lanes of Interstate 5 in Tukwila during a rolling gun battle before the pair crashed into a third vehicle, snarling traffic for weekend commuters after the lanes were shut down for several hours.</p> <p>One person was injured during the incident, which occurred shortly before 2:30 p.m. near the I-5 and I-405 interchange, Washington State Patrol Trooper Rick Johnson said.</p> <p>The unidentified victim was taken to Harborview Medical Center for treatment but their injuries were said to be non-life threatening.</p> <p>Information about the victim's condition was not immediately available Saturday afternoon.</p> <p>Troopers closed several lanes while they investigated the crime but reopened all lanes around 5:30 p.m. Saturday evening.</p> <p>Johnson said the occupants of two vehicles were speeding and shooting at each other before they crashed near State Route 518 with a third vehicle that was not involved in the dispute.</p> <p>It was not clear why the occupants of the two vehicles were shooting at each other although troopers had said it may have been linked to road rage.</p> <p>None of the people involved in the incident have been publicly identified.</p> <p>The incident led to massive traffic gridlock for motorists, who were forced to get by on the freeway shoulder and in the carpool lane.</p> <p>As of 5 p.m. Sunday evening, the northbound lanes remained blocked as officials searched for clues.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/02 Probe: deputy shot off-duty cop after 4sec.
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/deputy-shot-off-duty-wa-police-officer-4-seconds-after-arriving-investigation-finds/
GIST	<p>The Clark County sheriff’s deputy who mistakenly shot Vancouver police Officer Donald Sahota fired four shots within four seconds of arriving at the off-duty officer’s Battle Ground home, killing him.</p> <p>Deputy Jonathan Feller described what led up to the shooting the night of Jan. 29 as being “very fluid, very fast.”</p>

Video footage shows Feller park in front of the house, climb out of his SUV and take a shooting stance before firing his personal rifle, striking Sahota three times and the house once with .223 caliber rounds.

Feller, who told investigators his use of a personal firearm had been approved by the Sheriff's Office, said he believed he had shot an armed robbery suspect whom law enforcement officers were pursuing.

The new information, released Friday by the Clark County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, comes from hundreds of pages of investigative reports compiled by the Lower Columbia Major Crimes Team, including photos, videos, and audio of 911 calls and interviews with those involved in the incident.

The shooting investigation will be reviewed by prosecutors to determine if Feller should face criminal charges.

In a Feb. 6 interview with investigators, Feller said he saw a man, who generally matched the description of the robbery suspect, pick up a gun from the ground in front of Sahota's house. The man then ran toward the house. Feller said he ordered the man to get on the ground, but the man didn't respond and tried to force his way through the front door.

A video compilation of the incident shows the man kicking the front door several times; it also states that a witness heard Feller give commands.

"I believed that if that person got in the house, that they'd kill them," Feller said through sobs in his recorded interview with investigators. "And I had to stop that person from getting in and hurting the innocent people. So I fired my gun, multiple times, and tried to assess if they were being affected."

He later told investigators that "it happened so fast, I didn't see any alternative."

But moments later, he realized he had shot Sahota, 52, the homeowner and an off-duty police officer.

"It was a blur there for a little while, and I felt hollowed out, very much gutted at that point," he said.

The Clark County Medical Examiner's Office found that Sahota died from multiple gunshot wounds to the torso.

Shooting followed robbery, pursuit

Before the shooting, law enforcement drone and aircraft footage also captured the confrontation and struggle between Sahota and the robbery suspect, identified as Julio Cesar Segura, 20, of Yakima.

Segura stabbed Sahota three times with a folding knife, according to the investigative records. Though Sahota died from the gunshot wounds, investigators say the stab wounds to his upper torso and abdomen caused "great bodily harm."

Prosecutors are making the case that Segura's actions led to the killing, and they have charged him with multiple felonies, including murder.

His defense attorneys attempted to block the release of the shooting investigation, arguing Segura is a witness and that it could prejudice his criminal case. A Clark County Superior Court judge denied their motion.

At 8:14 p.m. Jan. 29, a clerk at a Chevron in Orchards called 911 to report he had just been robbed at gunpoint. He said a man pointed a handgun at his chest and demanded the money in the register. The clerk provided a suspect description and last known direction, investigative records show.

Deputies were dispatched to the robbery call. They found probable cause for first-degree robbery, 10 minutes after the clerk's call. Two minutes later, the suspect vehicle, a silver Mercedes, was seen heading

north on Interstate 205 from Padden Parkway. The Mercedes reached speeds of 100 mph, according to investigators' video compilation.

The pursuit lasted about five minutes, before law enforcement officers deployed spike strips. The Mercedes missed the spike strip and crashed. The driver, later identified by investigators as Segura, ran from the car, according to the investigation.

Multiple law enforcement agencies responded to help set up a containment area. The investigation says that in addition to the Sheriff's Office, the Vancouver, Ridgefield and Battle Ground police departments, and Washington State Patrol responded, in addition to Southwest Washington Regional SWAT and a crisis negotiator. Feller responded as part of the Quick Reaction Team, which addresses "any imminent threats that occur in the containment area" before SWAT arrives, according to investigative records.

At 8:51 p.m., responding officers received an updated description of the suspect; it was the third description that had gone out — a dark- or tan-skinned white male with shaggy hair and glasses, wearing a long-sleeve shirt, black undershirt, bluejeans, and white, flat-bill baseball cap, investigative records state.

One minute later, a drone operator spotted someone walking on Northeast 84th Avenue. That person, who investigators believed was the robbery suspect, ran toward the Sahota home's front porch. At 8:56 p.m., Sahota's wife called 911 to report that a stranger was at their door acting suspicious; he told them he crashed his car, she said, and they could hear sirens in the area, according to the video compilation. Sahota's wife told the 911 dispatcher that her husband is a police officer and armed.

A dispatcher told Sahota's wife that she and her husband should close the door and stay inside because officers were searching for a man in the area. The dispatcher tried to get a description from her, and Sahota is then heard relaying a description in the background of the call.

Segura told investigators that Sahota said he could not help him and shut the door on him. The drone video shows Segura walking away from the house. When paired with 911 audio, Sahota is then heard calling to Segura to come back. Sahota's wife told the 911 dispatcher that they were trying to keep Segura there, according to the audio.

By 8:57 p.m., Sahota exited the house with a handgun and ordered Segura to the ground. Sahota's wife told the dispatcher she was trying to find handcuffs to assist her husband. Moments later, the two men started struggling, according to the investigative records.

Struggle ensues

The confrontation lasted one minute and 45 seconds.

In the aerial footage, the two men are seen fighting. Sahota's wife tells the dispatcher Segura is hitting Sahota. An object, officers believe to be a gun, is seen falling to the ground. Then a man, later found to be Segura, runs to the house and forces his way inside. The force of the door opening strikes Sahota's wife in the forehead, causing a large bruise, according to the investigation.

Sahota turned to pick up the gun from the ground, as Feller drove up to the house, and ran to the front door. At some point, Sahota's 9-mm handgun fired and hit the frame of the front door, though responding officers did not recall seeing or hearing anything, the investigative records show.

Moments after Feller shot Sahota, his wife ran out of the garage toward officers, shouting about her husband. When officers gave the wounded man on the porch commands to show his hands, Segura opened the front door and stuck his hands out. He then came out, hands in the air, and laid down on the ground, according to the investigation. Officers took him into custody and provided Sahota medical aid, but he died at the scene.

	<p>In an interview from the back of a patrol car, Segura told deputies he had stabbed Sahota, and in a follow-up interview, said Sahota had identified himself as a police officer, according to audio and written summaries of the interviews.</p> <p>“That’s all I had to do was lay there and wait for you guys to show up, but no, I fought back,” he told a deputy in the patrol vehicle. In the follow-up interview, he said his “primal instinct” took over.</p> <p>“I really hate that that happened. But it did happen, and I’m not going to lie about it, whine about it. It happened, I did it. I make my own decisions, and I’m going to have to live with the consequences. It’s going to hurt my mom, family and those who want to see me do good,” he later added while in the back of the patrol vehicle.</p> <p>Segura told investigators he believed he’d killed Sahota, according to the follow-up interview.</p> <p>During his initial interview Segura repeatedly asked the deputies why they were being so nice to him.</p> <p>“But I acted so inhuman today,” he said. “I can’t even recognize who I’ve become. I’m not this person.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/02 WA state’s worst prison Covid outbreak
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/wa-states-worst-prison-covid-outbreak-is-in-franklin-county-inmates-and-staff-sickened/
GIST	<p>The Coyote Ridge Corrections Center north of the Tri-Cities is in the midst of the biggest COVID outbreak in the Washington state prison system.</p> <p>The state Department of Corrections reported Friday that 186 of the 199 active cases in all of the state’s prisons are currently at the Connell facility.</p> <p>Also, 7 of the 32 cases among Washington prison employees statewide work there.</p> <p>In the last 30 days, 20% of the Connell prison’s 1,800 inmates have tested positive for COVID, said prison officials. The highest number of infections, however, was a few weeks earlier in mid-January, according to state data.</p> <p>The Connell site also has had one of the highest number of COVID-related inmate deaths in Washington.</p> <p>Since the start of the pandemic, 17 prison inmates have died statewide — most of them in Eastern Washington facilities.</p> <p>Coyote Ridge and the Stafford Creek prisons have had 5 confirmed COVID inmate deaths each, Airway Heights near Spokane reported 4 deaths and the Washington State Penitentiary in Walla Walla had 2 deaths.</p> <p>And 4 prison employees have died from COVID, including 3 at Stafford Creek in Aberdeen and 1 at Monroe, show state reports.</p> <p>The outbreak in Connell has put inmate pods in three housing units into quarantine, according to a memo sent to prisoners at the facility. The three medium security units affected, B, D and E, have been closed to visitors.</p> <p>The quarantined areas are continuing to be routinely tested twice a week, said the state.</p> <p>“Corrections is committed to everyone’s safety,” the department said in a March 29 memo. “We will continue to communicate with you as we progress through this pandemic.”</p>

	<p>The medium and minimum security prison can house up to 2,300 but has been averaging about 1,800 for months.</p> <p>To date, the prison reported 1,357 inmates have been sickened by COVID and 530 employees.</p> <p>This week, the prison in Walla Walla reported 2 inmates sick with COVID and 2 prison employees. Since the start of the pandemic the maximum security facility has had 2,118 inmates and 688 staff infected.</p> <p>This is the second wave of the omicron variant to hit the prison since it reached the Tri-City area in early January.</p> <p>This second wave in Benton and Franklin counties has not been as strong as the first wave of the disease. The highest weekly numbers show 195 new cases being reported during the week of March 13, compared to 249 during the week of Jan. 16.</p> <p>Though the omicron variant hit the prison harder than any previous version of the virus.</p> <p>The state agency reported that 10,920 incarcerated individuals had received at least one dose of the vaccine in prison.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/02 Seattle police probe 2 homicides in a day
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/second-seattle-homicide-in-one-day-saturday/
GIST	<p>Seattle police are investigating after a man died from a gunshot wound in the International District on Saturday, the second homicide in the city that morning.</p> <p>According to the police department's online blotter, officers were dispatched to a report of a man down at Sixth Avenue South and South Weller Street at 6:20 a.m.</p> <p>Officers arrived to find a 50-year-old man with a suspected gunshot wound.</p> <p>The man was pronounced dead at Harborview Medical Center.</p> <p>Earlier Saturday, police found another man who had been shot lying in the street in the Pioneer Square neighborhood after shots were fired in the 200 block of South Washington Street around 2:15 a.m. That victim died at the scene.</p> <p>Through March, violent crime in Seattle had already claimed 13 lives, accounting for half of the 26 homicides committed in King County and the highest figure for the first quarter of the year in Seattle since 2016.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/02 Ghislaine Maxwell conviction upheld
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/judge-upholds-ghislaine-maxwells-sex-trafficking-conviction/
GIST	<p>NEW YORK (AP) — A U.S. judge refused to throw out Ghislaine Maxwell's sex trafficking conviction Friday, despite a juror's failure to disclose before the trial began that he'd been a victim of childhood sexual abuse.</p> <p>Maxwell, a British socialite, was convicted in December of helping the millionaire Jeffrey Epstein sexually abuse several teenage girls.</p> <p>U.S. Judge Alison J. Nathan declined to order a new trial weeks after questioning the juror under oath in a New York courtroom about why he failed to disclose his personal history as an abuse survivor on a questionnaire during the jury selection process.</p>

The juror had said he “skimmed way too fast” through the questionnaire and did not intentionally give the wrong answer to a question about sex abuse.

“I didn’t lie in order to get on this jury,” he said.

In an opinion certain to trigger a higher court appeal, Nathan said the juror’s failure to disclose his prior sexual abuse during the jury selection process was highly unfortunate, but not deliberate.

The judge also concluded the juror “harbored no bias toward the defendant and could serve as a fair and impartial juror.”

Had the juror answered the questions correctly, Maxwell’s lawyers had said they potentially could have objected to the man’s presence on the jury on the grounds that he might not be fair to a person accused of a similar crime.

The U.S. attorney’s office declined comment Friday. Messages were left with Maxwell’s attorneys.

Maxwell, 60, was convicted of sex trafficking and other charges after a monthlong trial that featured testimony from four women who said she played a role in setting them up for abuse by Epstein.

Epstein killed himself in August 2019 as he awaited trial at a federal jail in New York on related sex trafficking charges.

Maxwell says she’s innocent.

After the trial’s conclusion, the juror, identified in court papers only as Juror No. 50, gave interviews with several media outlets describing deliberations, and disclosing that he’d been abused as a child. He said he persuaded some fellow jurors that a victim’s imperfect memory of abuse doesn’t mean it didn’t happen.

Potential jurors in the case had been were required to fill out a 50-page questionnaire including a question that asked: “Have you or a friend or family member ever been the victim of sexual harassment, sexual abuse, or sexual assault?”

The juror checked “No.”

The juror said in one of the interviews that he didn’t remember being asked that question, which was No. 48 on the form.

Defense lawyers for Maxwell asked the judge to immediately order a new trial, but she said she could not do so without questioning the juror.

After Nathan questioned the juror in early March, lawyers on both sides submitted written arguments. Prosecutors said the juror made an “honest mistake” and that it was “crystal clear” that Maxwell received a fair trial.

Maxwell’s lawyers disagreed.

“Excusing Juror 50’s false answers because he believes his concealed history of sexual abuse did not affect his ability to serve as a fair and impartial juror does not satisfy the appearance of justice,” they argued. “Only a new trial would.”

But Nathan rejected that reasoning, writing that the juror’s claims that he remained impartial toward Maxwell rang true.

	When questioned about it, he answered “frankly and honestly, even when the answers he gave were the cause of personal embarrassment and regret,” she said. “His tone, demeanor and responsiveness gave no indication of false testimony.”
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/01 Deadly violence against law enforcement
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/deadly-violence-against-law-enforcement-having-an-effect/LBTFKVBZXR5JAQGX3QOQE2ZMM/
GIST	<p>The recent spate of violence directed at law enforcement is sending a chill through that tight-knit community.</p> <p>It comes as the state legislature this year appropriated \$2.5 million to provide additional wellness care for officers and deputies across the state.</p> <p>Exactly a week ago, Everett officer Dan Rocha was killed while Pierce County was saying goodbye to Deputy Dom Calata.</p> <p>Since then, there has been an outpouring of support from the citizens of Everett to their fallen officer.</p> <p>But the impact of all of this is being felt acutely by those in law enforcement and anyone who cares about them.</p> <p>It is, by now, a familiar sight in Western Washington. This time it’s the city of Everett showing its heartfelt support for an officer killed in a violent attack on duty.</p> <p>“Oh, yeah, they’re all hurting,” said Byllie Ricketts, “and their wives, too.”</p> <p>Ricketts has been here many times this week. She says the recent violence toward those sworn to protect and serve is misplaced.</p> <p>“I mean I’ve met 200 or 300 of them,” said Ricketts. “And they’re very kind. And they love the community.”</p> <p>“It becomes sort of overwhelming,” said former Bremerton police officer Steve Strachan.</p> <p>He says everyone who wears the uniform knows theirs is a dangerous job. But Strachan, now the executive director of the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs, says hardly anyone in law enforcement is prepared for so much violence toward them in two short weeks.</p> <p>And this show of support matters.</p> <p>“At times like this when everyone is feeling raw and exhausted,” said Strachan, “and it takes that support from the community to sort of get everybody through it.”</p> <p>In mid-March, Pierce County deputy Dom Calata was killed, his partner badly hurt; while Everett officer Dan Rocha and off-duty Edmonds officer Tyler Steffins were killed this week. Then on Thursday night, two Olympia officers were stabbed.</p> <p>Strachan blames several factors.</p> <p>“Law enforcement’s understaffed,” he said. “Tremendous amount of stress, concerns about the environment out there in terms of emboldened criminals.”</p> <p>He says the legislature’s allocation of taxpayer money toward the mental health of deputies and officers will help alleviate the pain.</p>

	<p>But everyone can play a role.</p> <p>“Reaching out, saying ‘hey, we’re thinking of you; hey, we support you; hey, how are you doing? And make sure you stay safe,’” he said. “It’s appreciated.”</p> <p>Of course, that is what this community has been doing over this very sad week.</p> <p>Now people here are making plans to say a final goodbye to this officer, killed just one week ago.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	04/01 SPD shoplifting crackdown: 49 arrests
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/one-day-citywide-crackdown-on-shoplifting-nets-49-arrests-in-seattle
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Seattle Police officers working with stores involved the city’s Retail Theft Program conducted a citywide shoplifting emphasis on Thursday that yielded 49 arrests.</p> <p>Eight businesses including major Brands like Home Depot, Lowe's, Target and Fred Meyer participated in the undercover operations.</p> <p>The emphasis was part of the Mayor’s "Operation New Day" which is intended to focus on crime spots in the city. Shoplifting has become nearly a daily hardship for stores throughout the region.</p> <p>"This emphasis is something that was asked for by the City and directed to us from City Hall because retail theft is a priority" said SPD Officer Aaron Johnson who was part of a 12-officer unit that targeted the Lowe's on Rainier Avenue South.</p> <p>SPD’s Community Response Group were joined by patrol officers, detectives of the General Investigative Unit, Narcotics and other units in operations performed in each of the city’s five police precincts.</p> <p>City and County prosecutors also participated in the emphasis.</p> <p>Police say their emphasis is to go after people stealing not because of poverty but because of profit.</p> <p>"A lot of time when we apprehend somebody they will immediately tell us 'I've been let off in the past, I'm usually going to sell these items. I'm a user,'" said SPD Sargent Jamison Maehler.</p> <p>Seattle Police say 13 people were booked for various felony charges and verified warrants.</p> <p>Police attempted to arrest two of those individuals in the Lowe's parking on Rainier Avenue when the suspect’s vehicle, a Dodge Durango raced out of the parking lot.</p> <p>Inside the Durango, was the shoplifter police say carted out a boxed memory foam mattress and some pillows without paying.</p> <p>Police did engage in a vehicle pursuit because there was a baby inside the Durango, and it was a case of shoplifting, a non-violent crime.</p> <p>"This crime and the fact we knew a child was on board both dictate it's not worth that risk," said Johnson.</p> <p>Undercover officers tailed the Durango for 10 miles until it stopped in a parking lot of an apartment building on Lake City Way.</p> <p>The driver was arrested for eluding police and reckless endangerment of a child, and is currently being held in jail on \$10,000 bail.</p>

	<p>King County prosecutors said she was a flight risk having 21 warrants for her arrest in the last 13 years, including 3 open warrants.</p> <p>Custody of her 10-month-old boy was handed over to her cousin, police said.</p> <p>The man is currently being held in jail on several parole violations and has not been charged with the shoplifting theft.</p>
Return to Top	

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[Return to Top](#)